THE BOOK OF *RESH MELLE* BY YOḤANNAN BAR PENKAYE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT AND A STUDY OF ITS LITERARY GENRES

By

Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel

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Abstract

This dissertation offers a study of the fifteen books of *Resh Melle*, a work written in Mesopotamia before the close of the seventh century A.D. by Yoḥannan (John) bar Penkaye. John's purpose is to explain God's dispensation in human history. He offers theological instruction through the medium of historical narrative.

Chapter one discusses John's political and ecclesiastical context. The fifteenth book of *Resh Melle* illustrates historical events which were contemporary to John. This chapter also discusses the rise of Islam, which had a great impact on the monastic centres and the numerous communities that formed the Church of the East.

Chapter two investigates the life, literary works, and importance of the author. The works that have been traditionally attributed to John are discussed and their authenticity assessed. The chapter also discusses John's importance for modern scholarship in various fields of study, including history, theology, exegesis, liturgy, and asceticism.

Chapter three discusses the title, provenance, sources, manuscripts, editions and translations of *Resh Melle*. A survey of Syriac literature is undertaken to explain the idiomatic meaning of the title. A description of the four manuscripts of *Resh Melle* which were consulted by this study is also given, along with information on the other extant (but unedited) manuscripts of the work. The chapter closes with a summary of modern editions and translations.

The fourth and final chapter examines the question of the literary genres of *Resh Melle.* John’s intention is clear: to produce a concise account of world history. The apocalyptic genre is clearly attested in certain sections of the work, but mainly towards its end. The bulk of *Resh Melle* employs other genres, including historiography, theology, exegesis, pedagogy, homily and philosophy. These genres are identified and illustrated with numerous quotations from John’s work, which we translated into English for the first time.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank various people for their assistance in the completion of this dissertation. To begin with, I am deeply indebted to my dissertation committee. My supervisor and mentor, Professor Amir Harrak, provided advice and encouragement through all the years of my academic studies. His instruction in Aramaic and Syriac was of immeasurable benefit, as was his guidance in framing the present study. I would like to thank Prof. Kyle Smith for his thorough reading of my manuscript at its various stages; his judicious criticism and recommendations for the development of my thesis is highly appreciated. I would like also to thank Prof. Paul-Alain Beaulieu and Prof. Abdel-Khalig Ali for reading my manuscript and providing crucial feedback. The recommendations of my external examiner, Prof. Adam Becker, will be quite helpful as I prepare my thesis for publication.

I would also like to thank the many members of the Assyrian community and of the Assyrian Church of the East who have supported and encouraged my study through all these years. My special thanks and gratitude go out to my late Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV († March 26, 2015), who greatly supported higher education and learning in his Church but sadly is not here to see the completion of my doctoral work.

Finally, in recognition of the centennial of the genocide of Assyrians by the Ottomans during WWI, it is with great honour that I dedicate this work to the persecuted Christians of the Assyrian Church and nation, who continue to be found in their ancient homeland as well as in flourishing communities around the world.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iv
Table of Contents **v**
List of Abbreviations ix
Introduction 1

Chapter 1: The Seventh Century Context 10

- 1.1 **Political Context** 10
  - 1.1.1 Byzantine-Sasanian Relations 11
  - 1.1.2 The Rise of an Arab Empire 13
    - 1.1.2.1 The Rise of Islam 14
    - 1.1.2.2 Byzantine-Arab Relations 16
- 1.2 **Ecclesiastical Context** 18
  - 1.2.1 Monophysitism 20
  - 1.2.2 Messalianism 26
- 1.3 **The Church of the East** 29
  - 1.3.1 The Name “Church of the East” (ܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ) 29
    - 1.3.1.1 The Synod of Isaac (410 A.D.) 30
    - 1.3.1.2 The Synod of Yab’alaha (420 A.D.) 31
    - 1.3.1.3 The Synod of Dadishoʿ 32
    - 1.3.1.4 A Summary of the evidence of the early synods 32
    - 1.3.1.5 Other references to “the Church of the East” 33
    - 1.3.1.6 John’s use of the name “the Church of the East” 33
  - 1.3.2 Institutions 35
    - 1.3.2.1 The Synod 35
    - 1.3.2.2 Schools and Monastic Learning Centres 38
    - 1.3.2.3 Missions 40
  - 1.3.3 Influence of the Political and Religious Context 44
    - 1.3.3.1 The Sasanian Context 44
    - 1.3.3.2 The Arab Context 49
- 1.4 **Monasticism in the Church of the East** 53
  - 1.4.1 Terms and Definitions 53
  - 1.4.2 The Tradition of Mar Awgen 54
  - 1.4.3 The tradition of Mar Abraham the Great 57
- 1.5 **The Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol** 59
- 1.6 **John’s View of Monasticism** 65
  - 1.6.1 The Origin of Monasticism According to John 66
  - 1.6.2 Virginity and Holiness 69
  - 1.6.3 Bride and Bridegroom 70
  - 1.6.4 The term ‘Covenant’ (ܩܝܡܐ ; *Qyama*) 72

Chapter 2: Yoḥannan (John) bar Penkaye: A Biographical Sketch 76

2.1 **Life** 76
2.2 **Literary Works** 81
  2.2.1 John’s witness to his own works 82
  2.2.2 The Manuscript of Tabriz 82
    2.2.2.1 BL OR 9385 83
    2.2.2.2 The *Book of Partute* (‘Crumbs’) 87
    2.2.2.3 Sources Syriaques 87
  2.2.3 Catalogue of ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis 87
  2.2.4 *The Pearl: on the Truth of Christianity* by ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis 88
  2.2.5 *Anonymous Biography* 89
  2.2.6 Mingana (i.e. MMC), Syr. 47 89
  2.2.7 Mingana (i.e. MMC), Syr. 488 90
  2.2.8 *The Book of Ḥudra* 91
  2.2.9 Library of Seʿert 92
  2.2.10 Summary of Bibliographical Evidence 92
2.3 **John’s importance for modern scholarship** 93
  2.3.1 A Historian 94
  2.3.2 A Theologian 99
  2.3.3 An Exegete 101
  2.3.4 A Liturgist 102
  2.3.5 An Ascetic and Mystical Author 104

Chapter 3: The Book of *Resh Melle* 106

3.1 **Title** 106
3.2 **The phrase ‘resh melle’ and related terms in earlier texts** 107
  3.2.1 *Danniel 7:1* 107
  3.2.2 *Quhlath (Ecclesiastes) 10:13* 107
  3.2.3 *Psalm 111:10* 108
  3.2.4 *The New Testament* 108
  3.2.5 *The Syriac Version of the Hexaemeron of Basil* 109
  3.2.6 *Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 A.D.)* 110
  3.2.7 *The Synod of Ishoʿyahb (585 A.D)* 110
  3.2.8 *The Book of Mnawatha* (“The Book of Gifts”) 111
3.3 **Meaning of ‘resh melle’ for John** 113
3.4 **Time of Composition** 115
3.5 **Purpose of Writing** 118
3.6 **The missing Preface** 119
3.7 **Sources** 122
3.8 **Biblical Citations** 127
3.9 **Surviving Manusctiprs** 130
  3.9.1 Bibliotheque de l’Université de Strasbourg, no. 4133 (BS) 130
  3.9.2 Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris, R 90793, Syriaque 405, R 90794, Syriaque 406 (BP) 130
  3.9.3 British Library, OR 9385 (BL) 131
  3.9.4 *The Mingana Manuscript,* no. 179 (MM) 131

3.10 **Editions, Translations, and Scholarship** 132
Chapter 4: Literary Genres in *Resh Melle* 134

4.1 **Historiography** 134
  4.1.1 Terms with historical connotation 135
    4.1.1.1 *tashʿitha* (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) 135
    4.1.1.2 *suʿrana* (ܣܘܥܪܢܐ) 136
    4.1.1.3 Sharba (ܫܪܒܐ) 137
    4.1.1.4 *tni* (ܬܢܝ) 137
    4.1.1.5 *ʿuhdana* (ܥܘܗܕܢܐ) 138
    4.1.1.6 *mlo'a* (ܡܠܘܐܐ) 138
    4.1.1.7 *makhtwanutha* (ܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ) 139
    4.1.1.8 *ṭebba* (ܛܒܐ) 139
    4.1.1.9 *kunasha* (ܟܘܢܫܐ) 139
    4.1.1.10 Summary of the evidence 140
  4.1.2 **Universal History** 143
  4.1.3 **Theological History** 145
4.2 **Theology** 147
  4.2.1 God 147
  4.2.2 Creation 150
  4.2.3 Anthropology 154
    4.2.3.1 Glory 154
    4.2.3.2 Sin 155
    4.2.3.3 Redemption 156
    4.2.3.4 Eternal Life 157
  4.2.4 Angels and Demons 158
  4.2.5 Soteriology 162
  4.2.6 Baptism 165
    4.2.6.1 Types of Baptism in the Old Testament 165
    4.2.6.2 Explanation of why Christ was baptized 167
    4.2.6.3 Regeneration through Jesus Christ 167
    4.2.6.4 The Gifts of the Holy Spirit 168
  4.2.7 Eucharist 168
    4.2.7.1 Sacrifices 169
    4.2.7.2 The Offerings of Melchizedek 171
    4.2.7.3 Eucharist and Passover 172
  4.2.8 Trinity 173
  4.2.9 Christology 176
  4.2.10 Ecclesiology 182
    4.2.10.1 The Tabernacle as a prototype of the Church 182
    4.2.10.2 The Church as the Body of Christ 183
    4.2.10.3 The Church as the Bride of Christ 184
    4.2.10.4 Apostolic Church 185
    4.2.10.5 The Church is Christocentric 186
    4.2.10.6 The Apostolic Succession 187

4.2.10.7 The Church is Catholic 188
4.2.11 Death 190
4.2.12 Resurrection 191
4.3 **Apocalypse** 193
4.4 **Exegesis** 199
4.4.1 The clarification of difficult terms 200
4.4.2 Typological interpretation 201
4.4.3 Systematic interpretation 203
4.4.3.1 Psalm 45 203
4.4.3.2 Psalm 110 206
4.4.3.2.1 Scepter 207
4.4.3.2.2 Firstborn 208
4.4.3.2.3 Priest as Melchizedek 208
4.4.3.2.4 King 208
4.4.3.2.5 Vengeance 209
4.5 **Pedagogy** 209
4.6 **Homily** 213
4.6.1 Direct Speech 213
4.6.2 Exhortations 214
4.6.3 Addressing Biblical Figures 214
4.6.4 Exclamations 215
4.6.5 Lamentation 216
4.6.6 Thanksgiving 216
4.7 **Philosophy** 217

Conclusion 223
Bibliography 227
Appendix A 238
Appendix B 240

List of Abbrreviations

AMS	*Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, ed. Paul Bedjan
BL	*Resh Melle* (OR 9385) at the British Library
BO	*Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana,* ed. and trans. J. S. Assemani. Rome, 1719-28. Repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000.
CMCM	*Catalogue of the Mingana Colletion of Manuscripts* (vol. I, Cambridge, 1933)
CSCO	*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*
DCC	*Dictionary of the Christian Church*
GEDSH	*Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*
HASO	*History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*
IBEW	*Index of Biblical and Ecclesiastical Writings* (by ʿAbdishoʿ)
JA	*Journal Asiatique*
MCE	*The Modern Catholic Encyclopaedia*
MMC	*Mingana Manuscript Collection*, (Selly Oak Colleges Library, Birmingham, U. K., 1983)
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (New York: 1890; repr. Grand Rapids: WM B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986)
NRSV	*New Revised Standard Version,* (Bible)
OLA	*Orientalia Lovaniesia Analecta*
OS	*L'Orient Syrien*
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*, Paris, 1903-
PS	*Patrologia Syriaca*, 3 vols., Paris, 1893-1926
RM	*Resh Melle*
SO	*Synodicon Orientale*
Syr.	Syriac

Introduction

Our interest

Yoḥannan (John) bar Penkaye was an East-Syrian theologian-monk who lived during the seventh century A.D. John's *Resh Melle*[1] is an important source since it was written in a period which witnessed major political changes. A study of John's work contributes to our understanding of not only the author and his political views/ideas/impressions, but also conditions in the Church of the East in general at that time.

The name of John is well-known throughout the history of the Church of the East. In his *Book of Marganitha* (the Pearl), the major thirteenth-century author ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis refers to one of John's Christological arguments.[2] Since this work functioned as a kind of catechism, ordinary members of the Church would have had at least some awareness of John's contribution to the tradition with which they identified. Additionally, a hymn attributed to John is incorporated into the *Ḥudra* (the official prayer book of the Church of the East) and is chanted every year during the Feast of Nativity. John's *Resh Melle* (the focus of this study) was the source for a number of extracts included in the popular collection known as *Partute* ('Crumbs').[3]

Our study, however, is based not on the above fragments, but on extant manuscripts of *Resh Melle*, while we drew upon certain other major works by John when necessary. Our thesis addresses the question of the genre of *Resh Melle*, a subject that has never been tackled in modern scholarship. While some studies have categorized it as an apocalypse, it needs to be asked whether this source does not in fact include a variety of genres, as one would expect from the extensive range of topics it discusses. The use of various genres demonstrates John's wide interests and his access to a number of different types of sources, whether biblical, historical, or theological. By focussing on a multiplicity of genres, our thesis aims to fill a gap in the study of John's *Resh Melle*.

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[1] All quotations of *Resh Melle* in this thesis are based on the Syriac text of (BL, OR 9385, fols. 3b-155b), henceforth *RM*. The same manuscript contains other works attributed to John (*i.e.* BL, OR 9385, fols. 155b-247a) which are also consulted from time to time, henceforth *BL*. For a description of BL manuscript see sections 2.2.2.1 and 3.9.3.

[2] ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, *The Book of Marganitha (the Pearl)*, trans. Eshai Shimun, (Kerala: Mar Themotheus Memorail Printing & Publishing, 1965), 92-3; the same hymn is translated by Percy George Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals II*, (London: Darf Publishers, 1852; repr. London: A. Wheaton, 1987), 33-4.

[3] See section 2.2.2.2 for a brief discussion of this source.

History of research on Resh Melle

Resh Melle was first made known to western scholars by the Maronite scholar Josephus Simonius Assemani,[4] who published his masterpiece, the *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* (four volumes) between 1719 and 1728.[5] This work introduces and compiles the work of all the Syriac sources known to the author at the time, including *Resh Melle*.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a number of scholars became interested in *Resh Melle*. In 1901, Anton Baumstark published the first major study of *Resh Melle* and provided a brief outline of each of the work's fifteen books.[6] He also contributed further information regading John's biography and his literary works in his important *History of Syriac Literature*.[7] Baumstark concludes that *Resh Melle* has no significance as a historical source, but that it should be appreciated as the oldest complete Syriac example of what we now refer to as a 'world history' that has managed to survive.[8] In his analysis, Baumstark provides a list of sources that John may have used, and observes that John's sources are more theological than historical. Thus he was the first to classify *Resh Melle* as a "theological history." In 1907, Addai

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[4] On Assemani's brief biography, see Sebastian Brock, "Assemani, Josephus Simonius", *GEDSH*, 43-4.

[5] See "John bar Penkaye" in ʿAbdishoʿ, *Catalogue,* Ebediesu, *Enumeratio librorum omnium ecclesiasticorum*, ed. and trans. J. S. Assemani, (Rome: 1719-28 [Repe. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000]), *BO,* III/1, 189-90.

[6] See Anton Baumstark, "Eine syrishe Weltgeschichte des siebten Jahrh.s" in *Römische Quartal Schrift* 15 (1901), 279-80.

[7] See Anton Baumstark, "Joḥannan b. Penkaje" in *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, (Bonn, 1922), 210-11. The works of Duval and Chabot on Syriac Literature also conctribute to our figure John bar Penkaye. See Paul-Rubens Duval, *La littérature syriaque*, (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1907); and Jean-Baptise Chabot, *Littérature syriaque*, (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1934).

[8] See Baumstark, "Eine syrishe Weltgeschichte des siebten Jahrh.s", 279-280.

Scher published a short biography of John and gave brief summaries of the fifteen books of *Resh Melle*. He also listed the works that have been attributed to John.[9] In the same year, Alphonse Mingana edited parts of *Resh Melle* (Books X-XV) and provided a French translation of its fifteenth book.[10]

In 1963, Taeke Jansma, a professor at the University of Leiden, responding to the wishes expressed by the directors of the "L'Orient Syrien" to be informed of any work prepared in the field of Syriac Studies, published an article on a projected edition of *Resh Melle*.[11] In this article, Jansma explained that he intended to use *Resh Melle* to investigate the influence of Jewish and Greek exegesis of the Old Testament on the Church of the East. Like Baumstark, Jansma observed that *Resh Melle* is more theological than historical, and that its extended title ("A History of the World") does not reflect the very limited scope of the material in the work itself. He concludes that John's exegesis shows the influence of the historical and typological methods of the School of Antioch and its champion Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428 A.D.).

In 1987, Sebastian P. Brock published an article on *Resh Melle* and included the first English translation of a major portion of the text (the end of book XIV and most of book XV).[12] Brock agrees with the assessment of Baumstark that *Resh Melle* is a religious history, but argues that its final book provides important evidence of the contemporary theological interpretation of events in the late seventh-century and the apocalyptic expectations at that time, including valuable details on the rebellion of al-Mukhtar. In 1997, Robert Hoyland, agreeing with Brock, rejected Baumstark's claim that *Resh Melle* is "without importance as a historical source" for the late seventh century.[13] In 2007, Lutz Greisiger argued that John's work is unique in its reflection of the response to Muslim rule among the monastic elite in north Mesopotamia. He observes that for John, "God's most severe punishments take the form of natural disasters" rather than being a direct result of Arab rule. He also noted that John "provides a particular local perspective on the rebellion of al-Mukhtar and internal Umayyad strife and gives historical information about these political events that is otherwise unavailable."[14] In 2011, Muriel Debié, agreeing more with previous scholarship, argued that *Resh Melle* "is probably better understood as a theological rather than as a historical work, unless strictly religious history is meant."[15]

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[9] See Addai Scher, "Notice sur la vie et les œuvres de Yohannan bar Penkayê," *Journal asiatique* 10 (1907), 161-178.

[10] For the Syriac text, see *Sources Syriaques,* vol. I:2, ed. and trans. A. Mingana, (Mosul: Dominican Press, 1907), 1-204.

[11] See T. Jansma, "Projet d'edition du Ktaba d-Rēš melle, de Jean bar Penkāyē", *L'Orient syrien*, vol. 8 (Paris: 1963), 87-106.

[12] In his partial English translation of *Resh Melle* Brock gives page numbers as edited by Mingana in *Sources Syriaques.* Brock provides translations from the following pages of Mingana's edition: Book XIV, 141* to 143*; Book XV, 143* to 148* [part of 148* - 154* are skipped], the English translation continues (154* to 168* [again skipping 168* to the end, 171*]. See S. P. Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John bar Penkaye's Resh Melle*",* 51-75.

Although most of the early scholarship on *Resh Melle* (i.e., that of Duval, Baumstark, Scher, Mingana, and Chabot) was based on a study of the available Syriac manuscripts, no critical edition or complete translation was produced. Most subsequent modern studies of *Resh Melle* are based on partial Latin, German, French, and English translations. Later studies would contribute further details and knowledge, but these were still mostly based on the small portion of text that had been translated into modern languages. There is a pressing need for a critical edition and for the translation of the entire work into modern languages in order for the analysis of this work to advance. The present thesis is a step toward this goal.

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[13] See Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on Early Islam,* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997)*,* 195.
[14] See Lutz Greisiger, "John bar Penkaye" in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, vol. 1 (600-900)*, eds. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 179.
[15] See Muriel Debié, "Writing History as 'Histories': The Biographical Dimention of East Syriac Historiography" in *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 56.

The importance and scope of this Thesis

Earlier studies on John's *Resh Melle* have certainly enriched our understanding of the work and its author, and have introduced some of the major interpretive issues concering this text. One of these issues is the question of the genre to which *Resh Melle* belongs. Various scholars have had differing views on this question. Some have assigned it to apocalyptic, others to theological history or world history. By contrast, this thesis takes a comprehensive approach to *Resh Melle* and aims at elucidating *all* of the types of writing included in the work. This will allow for a much deeper understanding of *Resh Melle*, since material that does not fit into a single genre may then be appreciated on its own merits. This is significant, since John's contributions to certain fields (for example, exegesis and theology) may not be acknowledged if he is seen primarily as the author of a world history. To prepare for this research, we have produced a critical edition of the Syriac text of *Resh Melle* based on four different manuscripts, as described below (section 3.9). All of the variant readings that we have discovered have been minor. The long process of editing and studying the Syriac text has challenged us to deepen our understanding of the literary genres in *Resh Melle*. In the following, we provide a summary of the four chapters of our thesis.

Chapter One

In first chapter, the seventh century context for the composition of *Resh Melle* is investigated. Here we first discuss the political background, which, until the Arab Conquest, was dominated by the Byzantine and Sasanian empires. We shall pay particular attention to the impact of Sasanian rule on Syriac Christianity in Mesopotamia, particularly after the conversion of Constantine. From the early 4th century onwards, Christians in Persia were often perceived as having sympathies with their co-religionists in the Roman world, and thus as constituting a potential threat to the stability of a society based on Zoroastrian ideals.

During the 7th century, the Church witnessed the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the rise of the Arabs, of which *Resh Melle* is an extremely important witness. We also explore how Christians in Mesopotamia would perceive the new Arab rulers. Our discussion then shifts to an investigation of the ecclesiastical context of the seventh century, which reflects earlier Christological controversies. It highlights the tension that existed between the Church of the East, which had been dominant in all of Mesopotamia before this time, and the Syrian Orthodox Church, which was beginning to appoint their first bishops in Persia. The two Christian groups entered into debates at the royal court in order to win the favour of the Sasanian kings. Lastly, the chapter discusses monasticism in the Church of the East, including a description of John's own monastery and his view of the ascetic life. This discussion is important since we have consulted new material attributed to John. We argue for its authenticity (section 2.2.2.1) and show how it is important for understanding John's monastery.

Chapter Two

In the second chapter, John's life will be examined. John is acknowledged in Syriac literature and modern scholarship to have been an East Syrian monk of the Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol who flourished during the seventh century A.D. In our discussion, John's own works along with the extant biographies and biographical notes are taken into consideration in order to establish a few details about his life. We also discuss the number and authenticity of the works that John composed, which include certain items not mentioned in the *Catalogue* of ʿAbisishoʿ. In this connection it is important to understand that one of the major manuscript sources for John's work (the Tabriz manuscript, see 2.2.2) was produced in 1262 A.D., well before ʿAbisishoʿ had completed his *Catalogue* in 1298 A.D. The crucial question is: are these other works authentic? We consider a number of reasons for answering this question in the affirmative. We also explain why John was sometimes confused with the later ascetic and mystic author of Church of the East John of Dalyatha. We then turn to the significance of John as an author. A careful examination of John's works reveals that John is not merely a monk pursuing a religious life but also an author who wrote using a number of literary genres. In his *Resh Melle*, he introduces to his readers a universal history of the world which is heavily shaped by theology. In other words, John produces a theological history of events from the beginning, as recounted in the Book of Genesis, to his own time.

Chapter Three

In the third chapter, we examine the work *Resh Melle* itself. We begin by considering why John chose the idiomatic Syriac phrase *resh melle* (ܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ) for its title, and document the occurrences of this phrase in various contexts in *Resh Melle*. We also explore how this term is used in other Syriac sources in order to better understand what John himself meant by it. We then discuss and attempt to explain the surprising lack of a preface in *Resh Melle*. The preface is usually where the author discloses the purpose of writing. Within the work itself, however, John clearly reveals that his purpose is pedagogical. The possible sources used by John will then be considered, a task made difficult by the fact that John rarely identifies them. It is also vital to understand how John uses the biblical text: are verses quoted directly from the Peshiṭta, or are they quoted from memory or even paraphrased, at times revealing his own point of view? The chapter concludes with a survey of the surviving manuscripts, (partial) critical editions, and translations.

Chapter Four

The fourth chapter forms the bulk of our thesis. In this chapter, we demonstrate that John's *Resh Melle* makes use of multiple genres. The analysis of these genres contributes to a stronger understanding of John's perspective and interests. The full title of the work, and one which is confirmed in John's own words in the text itself, is "The Book of *Resh Melle*: and Historical Accounts of the Temporal World." It is obvious that the genre of universal history was adopted by John as the overall framework of *Resh Melle*, since the work begins with the creation account and proceeds to the author's own day. As John himself makes clear, the work is also intended to explain God's dispensation for saving mankind. The chapter then explores a number of sub-genres which John employs within the framework of universal history: historiography, theology, apocalypse, exegesis, pedagogy, homily, and philosophy. All of these sub-genres support John's aim of providing theological education to his readers through an examination of God's interventions in history. The framework for this theological education had already been worked out by earlier Church of the East theologians connected to the School of Nisibis, such as Narsai (d. 503 A.D.), Aba I (d. 552 A.D.), Michael Badoqa (fl. 6th-7th century), and Babai (d. 628 A.D.). John's methods of exegesis are undoubtedly those of the School of Nisibis and a continuation of the traditions of the School of Edessa, which were in turn adopted from the School of Antioch. Thus, these methods reveal the influence of the great *malpana* Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428 A.D.), 'The Interpreter', who is called by Narsai (d. 503 A.D.): "The Great [among] intellectuals and interpreters." But John is an exegete in his own right; he is quoted once by the famous interpreter Ishoʿdad (ca. 850 A.D.). John gives a messianic interpretation of Psalm 45, an emphasis which does not appear in the interpretation of the same psalm by Thodoret of Cyrus and Ishoʿdad.

We will end our thesis with a conclusion summarizing the results of our research. It is hoped that by analyzing the many genres which are included in John's *Resh Melle* and providing examples to illustrate each one, we will be able to shed much-needed light on this important 7th century monastic author in the Church of the East. This may in turn initiate further studies on John bar Penkaye.

Chapter 1

The Seventh Century Context

A study of the seventh-century context for the composition of *Resh Melle* is essential since it is the period in which John flourished and produced all his written works. It is crucial to our study to explore several important contexts for John's activity, including the political relations between the main powers of the time and the state of the Church of the East, including its relations with temporal powers. The chapter concludes by considering monasticism in the Church of the East in the seventh century, the monastery of Yoḥannan of Kmol (where John spent most of his life), and John's own view of monasticism.

1.1 **Political Context**

While *Resh Melle* contains earlier historical information, its final sections (that is the end of book XIV and all of book XV) provide historical accounts of the seventh century. John explains the collapse of the Sasanian Empire due to the Arab conquests (fols. 143b-44a), and informs the reader about the bloody battle between two Arab factions ("the Easterners" and "the Westerners") near the river Khazir in 67 AH (= 686 A.D.) (fols. 149b-150b). John seems to have written his work in the aftermath of this battle, which included catastrophic events such as famine and plague (section 3.4). He is also clearly aware of certain regions of the Byzantine Empire which were permanently lost to the Arabs, such as Syria and Egypt (fols. 144a-b).[16] John's reporting of these political developments is in brief, in keeping with the goal of his work, which is to provide the 'main points' (*resh melle*)[17] of salvation history. A description of the wider political setting in the seventh century is crucial for understanding the context in which

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[16] See section 1.1.2.2.

[17] See sections 3.1-3.3 for a discussion of the term *resh melle*.

John wrote. This context will be explored by illustrating the relation between the main political powers in the seventh century A.D. Political instability and frequent wars would naturally cause many people to flee by crossing borders in both directions. The occurrence of various natural disasters such as famine and disease further intensified the problems that such people faced.[18]

1.1.1 Byzantine-Sasanian Relations

At the beginning of the fourth century A.D., a new direction began for the Roman Empire with the rise of Constantine (306-337) and the state support given to Christianity.[19] John states that before this time, there were persecutions against Christians in the Roman Empire as well as in the Persian Empire:

> From the East, the sword of the Magians was sharpened against us, and from the West, that of the Romans. Each of them was struggling against the other to see which of them was able to succeed in this [task]. Neither of them succeeded, for our Lord allowed all this [persecution] to happen so that it would be known that it was not human power that was causing His Gospel to be prosper, but His undefeated might (fol. 136a).

Constantine decided to move his capital city from the ancient site of Rome to the newly-founded Constantinople, the 'The City of Constantine.' The eastern Roman Empire, in which the Greek language became gradually dominant, later became known as 'The Byzantine Empire,' and continued to be the main rival of the Sasanian Empire in Persia.[20] The latter (which succeeded the Parthian empire in 224 A.D.) was in turn conquered by the Arabs in 637 A.D., which brought a new rival to the Byzantine Empire onto the scene.

In the early seventh century, conflict between the Byzantine and the Sasanian empires continued. There were some years of peace, however. For example, when a civil war erupted in Persia during Khosro II's (590-628) succession to the throne of Persia, Emperor Maurice (582-

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[18] At the end of Book XV in *Resh Melle*, John makes reference to such events.

[19] Emperor Constantine (306-337 A.D.) is highly praised in many liturgical hymns of the Church of the East, and especially in the liturgy for the "Feast of the Holy Cross." See *Ḥudra*, vol. III, 705-760.

[20] The Sasanian Empire collapsed by the mid-seventh century, but the Byzantine Empire lasted until the rise of the Ottoman Turks in 1453 A.D.

602) intervened by helping Khosro and reached a peace agreement in 591, which had the advantage of putting an end to the depletion of the Byzantines treasury.[21] However, this treaty was broken by the deposition and murder of Maurice in 602, and Khosro was at war with the Byzantines until 626-7, through which he gained control over all Egypt, Syria and Palestine.[22] After losing these important regions, which represented its chief supply of grain, the Byzantine Empire experienced great economic suffering.[23]

The achievements of Emperor Heraclius (610-641) were significant, since he was able to deal with very serious threats to the empire by Sasanian and Avar forces. Over a period of thirteen years (615-628 A.D.) he was able to defeat all his enemies and push the war with Khosro deep into the Sasanian Empire. He forced the Persians to sign a treaty which required them to withdraw from Egypt and from other Byzantine territories.[24] While the emperor was able to achieve many victories, he was also facing many problems within the empire. These problems included the burden of debt owed to the Church through which he had been financing his wars. Heraclius had sought the Church's help to raise the funds needed to pay troops through its gold, silver and other forms of wealth.[25] The great schism between the Chalcedonians and the Monophysites was also causing instability within the Empire, and the emperor was unable to reconcile them.[26] Haldon says that Heraclius' final years "mark a sad end to what had been a glorious reign. The Arab victories deprived the empire once again of territories that had only recently been won back with such difficulty and sacrifice."[27]

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[21] John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, *The transformation of a Culture,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 34.
[22] Ibid., 35.
[23] Ibid., 43.
[24] Ibid., 46.
[25] Ibid., 48.
[26] Ibid., 48.
[27] Ibid., 51.

Likewise, in Persia, the internal civil wars that broke out during the reign of Khosro II (590-628) and the drain on the treasury due to the ongoing campaign against Byzantium significantly weakened the empire and prepared the way for its quick collapse at the time of the Arab conquest. The citizens of both empires were heavily taxed in order to finance military operations.[28]

Both the Byzantine and the Sasanian empires depended on their vassal states, the Arab Ghassanid and Lakhmid kingdoms. The Lakhmid kingdom, with its capital city al-Ḥira, was a Sasanian vassal state until its surrender to the Arabs in 633 A.D. The Ghassanid kingdom, with its capital city Jabiya (in what is now the Golan Heights),[29] remained a Byzantine vassal state until the conquest of Syria by the Arabs in 636 A.D. The Ghassanids patrolled parts of the Byzantine border against the Sasanians and regulated trade. The Lakhmids did the same in the service of the Sasanian state. Both the Byzantines and the Sasanians depended on the experience of these Arab tribes to secure the borders of their empires against multiple Arab raids by other tribes from the Arabian Peninsula. The Ghassanid and Lakhmid kingdoms were predominantly Christian, but while the Ghassanids were Monophysite, the Lakhmids were Nestorians.

1.1.2 The Rise of an Arab Empire

The major conflicts in the late sixth and early seventh centuries between the Byzantines and the Sasanians greatly weakened the state of their empires. These conditions, however, were increasingly intensified in the seventh century by the rise of the Arabs as a new power. Thus, in the course of the seventh century, the Byzantine Empire lost about seventy-five percent of its revenues compared to what had been generated during the 6th century.[30] This was mainly the result of the permanent loss of Egypt and Syria to the Arabs. Now the Balkans and Anatolia would be strongly defended as the only sources of revenue and manpower.[31]

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[28] Likewise, we learn from the account of Shemʿon the Catholicos (d. 344 A.D.) that he opposed Shapur's order to impose a double tax, which led to his martyrdom and decades of persecution against the Christians in Persia. See "The Account of Shemʿon the Martyr," *AMS*, vol. II, 139; "S. Simeon bar sabbaʿe", ed. and trans. Michael Kmosko in *Patrologia Syriaca*, ed. and trans. I. Parisot, F. Nau, M. Kmosko, (Paris: , 1907), 798-99; *The Martyrdom and The History of Blessed Simeon Bar Ṣabbaʿe*, ed. and trans. Kyle Smith, (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2014), sec. 7, 82-3.

[29] Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol.2, part 1, (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 365.

The appearance of the Arabs on the political stage in the 7th century was very rapid and is clearly associated with Islam. John acknowledges this change by saying, "When the kingdom of the Persians came to an end, in the days of their king Khosro, the kingdom of the children of Hagar at once gained control over more or less the whole world" (fols. 143b-144a).[32]

1.1.2.1 The Rise of Islam

Islam is clearly associated with its founder, Muḥammad (570-632 A.D.), and it spread rapidly across the Arabian Peninsula.[33] John's *Resh Melle* is the earliest surviving work in Syriac in which the name of Muḥammad is attested as the founder of Islam (fol. 146a).[34] However, John gives the name as ܡܰܚܡܰܛ (*maḥmaṭ*), ending with the letter (ܛ; *ṭeth*), instead of the usual spelling *Muḥammad* (Arabic محمد), which ends with (ܕ; *dalath*). Later Syriac authors would use the common form (ܡܚܡܕ) instead of John's unusual one.[35] In his description of Muḥammad, John uses two Syriac terms: *mhadyana* (ܡܗܕܝܢܐ; 'guide')[36] and *tar'a* (ܬܪܐܐ; 'instructor').[37] In John's view, Muḥammad was the first guide and lawgiver for the Muslims, teaching and guiding them concerning the new religion of Islam:

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[30] Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 10.
[31] Ibid., 10.
[32] See Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century", 57.
[33] Moffett states that "the first documented Christian mission to southern Arabia" was during the reign of emperor Constantius II (337-361 A.D.), who sent Theophilus to lead an embassy into southern Asia. Even though the mission is described as political, Theophilus was a zealous Christian and a deacon who, en route, professed his faith before the Himyarite king, which led to his conversion. Moffett claims that Theophilus' mission "left no permanent mark in Arabia" where its influence "was only sporadic", but that "Nestorians from Persia and Monophysites from Syria laid the more abiding foundations of pre-Islamic Christianity in Arabia." See, Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. I, Beginnings to 1500,* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 274-5. On the mission of Theophilus, see also Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984; repr. 2006), 86-100; Christoph Baumer, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 140-41.
[34] Jacob of Edessa, a contemporary to John bar Penkaye, mentions the name of Muḥammad in his Chronicle: "And [Ma]ḥmaṭ (ܚܡܛ [ܡ]) went down through a trading [caravan] to the land[s] of Palestine, that of the Arabs, and Tyre-Phoenicia." See *Chronica Minora: III*, eds. Ernest Walter Brooks, Ignazio Guidi, and J-B. Chabot, (Louvain: Secrétariat de corpusSCO, 1905), Syr. 326.

> [The Arabs] held... an ordinance, stemming from the man who was their guide (*mhadyana*), concerning the people of the Christians and concerning the monastic station. Also as a result of this man's guidance they held to the worship of the One God, in accordance with the customs of ancient law [i.e. Old Testament].[38] At their beginnings they kept to the tradition of Muḥammad, who was their instructor (*tar'a*), to such an extent that they inflicted the death penalty on anyone who was seen to act brazenly against his laws (fol. 146a).[39]

It is interesting that John makes no reference to the Qur'an in the passage just quoted.[40] We must keep in mind that *Resh Melle* was composed around 687 A.D. (section 3.4). It is generally assumed that the verses of the *Qur'an* were still being orally transmitted after the death of Muḥammad in 632 A.D. and were only compiled during the reign of the Caliph ʿUthman (644-

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[35] See Timothy I, *The Debate on the Christian Faith between Patriarch Timothy I and Caliph Mahdi in 781 A.D.,* ed. and trans. Alphonse Mingana, (Cambridge: 1928), 133-34; See also MMC, Syr. 17, fols. 43a-b. Eliyya of Nisibis uses an alternative spelling and adds a description: "Muḥammad son of ʿAbdallah, the prophet of *ṭayyaye* and their first king" (ܡܚܡܕ ܒܪ ܥܒܕܐܠܗ ܢܒܝܐ ܕܛܝܝܐ ܘܩܕܡܝܐ ܕܡܠܟܝܗܘܢ). Eliyya, however, translates the Syriac phrase "the prophet of *ṭayyaye*" into Arabic as "the prophet of the Muslims" (نبيّ المسلمين). See Eliyya of Nisibis, *Opus Chronologicum*, [I], *Opus Chronologicum* [I], ed. E.W. Brooks, CSCO, SS, 7, (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1910), vol. 1, 126.

[36] See *RM*, Book XV, fol. 146a. The term *mhadyana* (ܡܗܕܝܢܐ) derives from the Syriac verb *haddi* (√ ܗܕܝ), which means 'to lead' or 'to guide'.

[37] *RM*, Book XV, fol. 146a. The word derives from the Syriac root verb *tarra* (√ ܬܪܐ) to means: to educate, to train, to lead and to guide.

[38] A similar idea is found in the *Legend of Sergius Baḥira* and may be related to the notion of an "ancient law" which appears in John. The *Legend* states that after the death of Sargis Baḥira, a certain Jew, Kaʿb, became a teacher, a scribe, and a prophet to the Arabs. He tried to deceive them by declaring that Christ's promise to send the Paraclete [Jn 14:16; 15:26; 16:7] had been fulfilled in Muḥammad (see 268-9), thus altering the account given previously by Sargis: "Sargis gave them the *New Testament* and Kaʿb the *Old* [*Testament*]." See, *The Legend of Sergius Bāḥirā*, ed. and trans. Barbara Roggema, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 304-5.

[39] Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century", 61.

[40] The Syriac *qur'an* 'ܩܘܪܐܢ' is attested in the Syriac account of Sargis Baḥira, see *The Legend of Sergius Bāḥirā*, ed. and trans. Barbara Roggema, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 266. "The Arabic word *qur'an* is not attested prior to the *Qur'an* itself and it was likely derived from, or influenced by, the Syriac cognate word *qeryana*, 'lection, reading ,' used by Syriac-speaking Christian communities both for the oral liturgical reading from scripture and for the scripture passage that is read aloud in divine service." See William A. Graham, "Orality", *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān: Vol. 3*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 584-7.

654 A.D.).[41] John's description is interesting since he emphasizes that "they kept to the tradition (ܡܫܠܡܢܘܬܗ; *mashelmanute*)[42] of Muḥammad" but does not mention the *Qur'an.*

1.1.2.2 Byzantine-Arab Relations

John does not discuss specific military encounters between the Byzantines and the Arabs but he does acknowledge their outcome. As stated above, this should probably be attributed to his goal in *Resh Melle* to produce a work that only deals with 'main points'. That being said, John was fully aware of these battles and their role in shaping the political world of the seventh century.[43] The following statement illustrates John's awareness of the extent of the Arab conquest:

> Only a short period passed before the entire world was handed over to the Arabs; they subdued all the fortified cities, taking control from sea to sea, and from East to West – Aigyptos and the whole of Meṣrin,[44] and from Crete to Cappadocia, from Yahelman[45] to the gates of Alan, Armenians, Syrians, Persians, Byzantines, Egyptians and all the intermediary regions: 'their hand was upon everyone'[46], as the prophet says. Only half the Byzantine Empire was left by them (fols. 144a-b).[47]

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[41] Reynolds argues that "[t]he historicity of the ʿUthmanic codex narrative is, for the most part, accepted by scholars in preference to narratives attributing the collection to Abu Bakr or other early caliphs." This narrative indicates that ʿUthman sent copies of a *muṣḥaf* he had, which was written in the dialect of Quraysh, to many regions while ordering the destruction of all other versions. See Gabriel S. Reynolds, "ʿUthman", *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān: Vol. 5,* ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 408-10.

[42] This Syriac word is derived from the extremely productive verbal root (ܫܠܡ; *shlem*) which, in its Afel form, can mean 'to commit to writing' or 'to hand down'. It is interesting that its prural from (ܐܫܠܡܘ; *ashlem*) is used in the prologue of Luke's gospel (1:2) to acknowledge the oral traditions which were 'handed down' by the first eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus. One wonders if John's expression (*mashelmanute d- Muḥammad*) is likewise a reference to oral tradition, that which existed before the approved version of the Qur'an was produced, and perhaps also that which continued on in the form of Ḥadith.

[43] When John composed *Resh Melle* in 687 A.D. he must had been fully aware of the collapse of the Sasanian empire (637 A.D.), the fall of Damascus (637 A.D.), Jerusalem (638 A.D.), Nisibis (640 A.D.), Edessa (641 A.D.), Nineveh (640s A.D.), Alexandria (642 A.D.), and most probably, the first Islamic siege of Constantinople (670-77 A.D.).

[44] In the phrase "Aigyptos ['Aghewṭos; ܐܓܒܛܘܣ] and the whole of Meṣrin (ܡܨܪܝܢ)" John is clearly referring to two distinct regions. John's wording may suggest that Aigyptos (= Egypt) is a reference to Lower Egypt, that is, the hellenized part of Meṣrin.

[45] Brock notes that the "[i]dentity [of Yahelman is] uncertain, but it represents the furthest south, just as the 'Gates of Ālān' designate the furthest north." See Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century", 58, n. E. One wonders if John's "Yahelman" (ܝܗܠܡܢ) has any connection with 'alamannia', a territory of certain Germanic tribes in central Europe.

[46] See Gen 16:12.

[47] Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century", 58.

The above statement clearly demonstrates that John, some forty years after the events in question, was fully aware that battles had taken place between the Byzantines and the Arabs. Although he does not mention them specifically, he must have known about the fall of Damascus (637 A.D.), Jerusalem (638 A.D.), Alexandria (642 A.D.), and the first Arab siege of Constantinople (670-677 A.D.). Likewise, he must also have known about the Arab conquest of the Mesopotamian cities of Nisibis (640 A.D.), Edessa (641 A.D.), and Nineveh (640s A.D.).

With the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, the Arabs soon realized that the Byzantine Empire was also exhausted as a result of its continual wars with the Persians, its economic problems, and Christian divisions within the Empire. These factors facilitated the Arab takeover of important Byzantine territories such as Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Armenia.[48] Christological divisions certainly contributed to the loss of Egypt to the Arabs (642 A.D). Benjamin, the Monophysite patriarch, welcomed the Arabs since the Chalcedonian-Monophysite issue remained unresolved.[49]

The Arabs' early victories were during the reign of ʿUmar (634-44), when they expanded their rule outside the Arabian Peninsula and began their first raids against Anatolia.[50] These raids continued under Muʿawiya (the future Caliph) who plundered Cappadocia and besieged Caesarea in 647 and brought back much plunder. The Arabs were finally able to construct a small naval fleet and began to raid the Mediterranean islands (such as Cyprus and Rhodes) in the 650s. In 655 the Byzantine fleet, commanded by Emperor Constans himself, was almost defeated by Muʿawiya's navy.[51] However, due to the first Arab civil war (which began after the murder of

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[48] Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 49.
[49] Ibid., 54-5.
[50] Ibid., 55.
[51] Ibid., 55.

Caliph ʿUthman in 656)[52], Muʿawiya signed a treaty with the Byzantines in 659 which lasted until 661-2.[53]

During the reign of Caliph Muʿawiya (661-80), the Arabs were able to establish firm bases in Cyprus and Rhodes and continued their raids against the Byzantines. In 674, the Arab naval fleet began a four-year blockade against the city of Constantinople.[54] It was during this blockade that the Byzantine fleet, for the first time, used a newly-developed weapon (the so-called 'Greek fire') that forced Muʿawiya to withdraw and negotiate a peace treaty. This victory enhanced Byzantine supremacy in the region, and even the Avars would now bring their gifts to the Emperor.[55] During his expedition into Cilicia in 684-5, Emperor Constantine IV imposed new tribute upon the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik in order to halt the Byzantines' advance.[56] His successor, Justinian II (685-695) would reinforce this treaty with ʿAbd al-Malik, but added the new requirement that income from Cyprus and Armenia and Iberia be shared.[57]

1.2 **Ecclesiastical Context**[58]

Various controversial Christological issues were debated at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.),[59] the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.),[60] and the Council of Constantinople II (553

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[52] *The Chronicle of Zuqnin* states that with the murder of ʿUthman (655/656 A.D.), there was a civil war between the Arabs of the Western region and those of the Eastern region. "The many battles which they fought in every region against each other lasted some five years, all marked by quarrels and conflicts." See *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Parts III and IV, A.D. 488-775, trans. Amir Harrak, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 145.

[53] Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 55.

[54] Ibid., 64.

[55] Ibid., 64.

[56] Ibid., 69.

[57] Ibid., 70.

[58] See the sections concerning the Church of the East in the Sasanian context (section 1.3.3.1) and in the Arab's context (section 1.3.3.2).

[59] Frend states the following regarding the Council of Ephesus: "This Council, perhaps the most tempestuous that ever assembled in the name of the whole Church, marked an important step in the longstanding rivalry between the Sees of Alexandria and Constantinople. Perhaps more important than that, it marked a stage in the conflict between the two rival concepts of our Lord, that of Antioch emphasizing his humanity, redeeming mankind by his divine example, and that of Alexandria emphasizing a divinity saving man from the consequences of sin by manifesting in his life the full essence of the divine nature." See, Frend, *The Early Church,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965;

A.D.).[61] These councils were unable to settle these Christological issues, however. In fact they contributed to further schisms and permanent divisions within Christianity.[62] Thus, John states clearly that Christianity in his own day was still divided into three groups as a result of the debates at the early Church councils mentioned above. In this regard he declares, "From then [i.e. 451 A.D.] until now, [each] of these three [Church] divisions have held [their dogmas] as if they were [apostolic] tradition" (fol. 143b). Although these councils were called by Byzantine emperors and were assembled in a city of the empire, they had implications for distant Christians who were living in the Persian Empire too. All Christians everywhere (excluding those defined as heretics), were heirs of the Nicene Creed (established by the Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D.) and thus embraced such articles of faith as the belief in one God, one Christ who is Lord and substantial with his Father, one Baptism, one Church, which is Apostolic and Catholic, etc.[63] At the end of his work, John mentions that certain "heretics" (presumably Monophysites) won over almost all of the Byzantine churches (now within Arab territories) to their side (fol.146b). Our

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repr. 8th ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 209. In a *memra* by Narsai (d. 503 A.D.) entitled, "A *memra* on the Greek Fathers: Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius", written after 431 A.D., and thus after the anathematizing of Diodore and Theodore, the author writes: "At the first Council [Nicaea: 325 A.D.], Diodore [d. 390] and Theodore [335-428] were not yet born; and who is able to utter a judgement against [those] whom were not born! And also in the second [Council, Constantinople: 381 A.D.], they had not arrived to leadership; thus it is clear that no Council had called them for judgement. By the third [Council, Ephesus: 431 A.D.] they had departed from the house of the living; who is so insane that they would accuse the dead in vain! (fols. 137b-138a). See *Homilies of Mar Narsai*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), vol. I, (fols. 129a-146a).

[60] The traditional view held by the Church of the East reflects her unwillingness to accept the Council of Chalcedon, even though it would not anathematize it since it had defended "two natures" in Jesus Christ, a correction of the "one nature" view which was expressed at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.). In addition, this unwillingness is based on the Council's expression of "one hypostasis" (one *qnoma*) and the affirmation that Mary is "God-bearer." See Luise Abramowski and Alan Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts II,* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 20.

[61] At this Council, the person and works of Theodore of Mopsuestia (who died in 428 A.D.) were condemned. See Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*, (Wilmington: 1983; repr. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990).

[62] See chapter four (section 4.2.9) for a discussion of John's comments concerning the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon and the divisions within Christianity.

[63] Many descriptions of the Church are found in the synods of the Church of the East (section 1.3) such as "the Church of God", "the Church of Christ" and "the parishes of Christ' reflect the idea that all Christians in the East as well as in the West represent the One Body of Christ.

discussion here will focus mainly on the ecclesiastical context in 7th-century Persian Mesopotamia, which was shaped by earlier fifth and sixth century Christian controversies within the Byzantine Empire.

1.2.1 Monophysitism

The Christological view of Monophysitism declares that Jesus Christ, after the unity of Divine and human natures, had only one nature, rather than two natures as in the Chalcedonian expression.[64] John acknowledges that the Church of the East expresses that Christ is "two natures (*kyane*; ܟܝ̈ܢܐ) and two hypostases (*qnome*; ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ),[65] in unity, one *prosopon* (ܦܪܨܘܦܐ) of Sonship."[66] John asserts that with the Christological controversies at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D), the Church suffered three schisms which continued into his own day. He distinguishes them demographically by two major groups, “the westerners” (ܡܥܪ̈ܒܝܐ) and “the easterners” (ܡܕܢ̈ܚܝܐ). With respect to Christology, John explains that “the westerners” were divided into two groups (which came to be known as ‘Chalcedonian’ and ‘Monophysite’) though he does not apply any names to them.[67] John states that one of the western groups “holds the doctrine of [Divine] suffering (*hashoshutha*; ܚܫܘܫܘܬܐ) and death”[68] which is a clear reference to Monophysites, since Chalcedonian and Nestorian Churches would attribute the physical suffering and death of Jesus Christ to his human nature alone. John identifies the members of his own Church as “the easterners.” As Sidney Griffith observes, “[T]he three mainline Syriac Christian denominations became known by later Christians and Muslim writers as ‘Melkites,’ ‘Jacobites,’ and ‘Nestorians.’”[69]

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[64] The Chalcedonian Christological view declares Jesus Christ to have two natures, a Divine nature and a human nature, which were united in the one Person of Jesus Christ.

[65] The expression *tren qnome* (ܬܪܝܢ ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ ; two hypostases) reflects how *qnoma* (hypostasis) is understood in Syriac literature. Philoxenus (d. 523 A.D.) argues that the Council of Chalcedon was mistaken in its affirmation of two *qnome*: "Instead of one Son and his [one] nature, they ventured to define two natures with respect to Him, those which are also acknowledged to be *qnome* (ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ). For it is not possible for a nature to be known or to be counted by itself without its existing as a *qnoma* too." See Philoxène de Mabbog, *Lettre aux moines de Senoun*, ed. and trans. André de Halleux, (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1963), Syr. 11; Trans. 9. The term *qnoma* is also attested in the writings of Ephrem (d. 373 A.D.) who express the same definition when he says in one of his hymns "On the Persons (ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ) of the Holy Trinity", "[At a place] where a *qnoma* (ܩܢܘܡܐ) does not exist, an empty name is placed in the midst; for if a thing lacks its *qnome* (ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ), its title is also in vain" (ܐܬܪܐ ܕܩܢܘܡܐ ܠܐ ܐܝܬ: ܫܡܐ ܣܪܝܩܐ ܣܝܡ ܒܡܨܥܬܐ. ܡܕܡ ܕܩܢܘܡܗ ܠܝܬܘܗܝ: ܐܦ ܫܘܡܗ ܒܛܠܐ ܗܘ.). Furthermore, in his analogy Ephrem clarifies: "Confess that the Father and the Son exist, in truth as in [their] names! The root of a name is its *qnoma* (ܩܢܘܡܐ); through it the names are fastened. For who can assign a name to something for which no *qnome* (ܩܢܘܡܗ ; its hypostasis) exists? How can a fruit be described, when it does not exist in truth!" See the third chapter "On the Blessed Ephrem" in *Morceaux choisis*, ed. Jacques Eugène Manna, (Mosul: Imprimerie des péres dominicains, 1901), 34-119.

[66] *RM*, fol. 143a. Bishop Shahdost demonstrates that the Synod of Aqaq (Acacius) and Barṣawma did "confirm the true belief [in Christ, who had] two natures (ܟܝ̈ܢܐ) and two *qnome* (ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ)." See Luise Abramowski and Alan Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts,* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), I, 28; II, 20. Abramowski argues however, that "Shahdost is reading the view of Nestorian orthodoxy since 612 into the earlier history of his church", for the formula in the Synod of Acacius (484 A.D.) speaks of "two natures and one person." See *Synodicon orientale*, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, (Paris: 1902), Syr. 562-98. Shahdost's remarks certainly agree with what John has to say in *Resh Melle* about the two *qnome*. Even earlier, however, Philoxenus (d. 523 A.D) says that "Diodore, Theodore, Theodoret, Nestorius, Irenaeus, Eutherius, Alexander, Andrew, Ibas, Puṭ (Photius?), Cyrus, John, Aqaq (Acacius) and Barṣawma [all]... divide him [i.e Christ] into two sons, two natures, and two hypostases (ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ), that of God the Creator and that of human, a created [one] (ܒܪܝܐ) and a Maker (ܥܒܘܕܐ)." See *The Discourses of Philoxenus Bishop of Mabbogh (A.D. 485-519)*, ed. and trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, (London: Ashers & Co., Publishers, 1894), cxxxvii.

In *Resh Melle*, John states that there were Christians in great number from all these groups, (that is, both “easterners” and “westerners”) who were serving in the Arab armies:

> Among them were also Christians in no small numbers: some belonged to the heretics, while other to us.[70] Once Muʿawiya had come to the throne, the peace throughout the world was such that we have never heard, either from our fathers or from our grandparents, or seen that there had ever been any like it... The accursed heretics, taking the situation then as beneficial to themselves, instead of converting and baptising the pagans, in accordance with ecclesiastical canons, started on a retrograde (kind of) conversion, turning almost all the churches of the Byzantines to their own wicked standpoint, reviving and re-establishing something that had been overthrown; (as a result) the majority of the westerners were regularly using (the addition to the Trisagion of) the words “... immortal, who was crucified for us.” All the churches became like uncultivated land (fols. 146a-b).

John’s statement above that “some belonged to the heretics” is a reference to Monophysites, who were earlier organized into the Syrian Orthodox Church by Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578 A.D.). The latter was ordained as the bishop of Edessa secretly in 542 A.D. by Theodosius of Alexandria, when both of them were in Constantinople. As Frend observes, "James [i.e. Jacob Baradaeus] became one of the great religious and missionary leaders of all times. Not for nothing did the Syrian Monophysites come to be called 'Jacobites' after him."[71] By gaining the strong support of Empress Theodora (527-548 A.D.), Jacob was able to reorganize the non-Chalcedonian communities in Syria to form the Syrian Orthodox Church, which has continued to flourish to this day.[72] Emperor Justinian I (527-565 A.D.) also supported non-Chalcedonian missionaries associated with John of Ephesus in southern Asia Minor, where almost one hundred churches and a dozen monasteries were built, and more than 70,000 pagans were converted.[73] It was during the region of Justinian that the phrase of the so-called 'Theopaschite Formula' ("who was crucified for us") was added after the words "...God who is immortal" in the original Trisagion hymn.[74] John's statement about the Arab Conquest quoted above (see section 1.1.2.2) emphasizes its geographical extent. One implication of this conquest was that the political boundary between Syria and Mesopotamia disappeared, which allowed the Monophysites to move eastwards more easily. They became the main threat to the Church of the East beginning in the seventh century.

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[67] John expresses some confusion when he states: “[Among] the Westerners, however, one [group] holds the doctrine of [divine] suffering (*ḥashoshutha*; ܚܫܘܫܘܬܐ) and death [*i.e.* Theopaschite Formula]; I do not know what [else] to call it.” See *RM*, fol. 143b, and our discussion on Christology, 4.2.9.

[68] *RM*, fol. 143b.

[69] See Sidney H. Griffith, “Christians under Muslim rule” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity III: Early Medieval Christianities c. 600-c. 1100*, eds. Thomas F. X. Noble, Julia M. H. Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 197-212.

[70] John’s reference here might be to the Arabs among the Ghassanid and Lakhmid kingdoms, who were largely Christian. While the Ghassanid were Christologically Monophysite, the Lakhmid were Nestorians.

In *Resh Melle*, John identifies those who began to attribute suffering to the Divine nature even before the Theopaschite Formula was adopted:

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[71] W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972; repr. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 2008), 285.

[72] See Amir Harrak, "Edessa", *GEDSH*, 138-9; and Sebastian P. Brock, "Yaʿqub Burdʿoyo", *GEDSH*, 431-2.

[73] Volker L. Menze, *Justininan and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 256-7.

[74] Brock observes that "Ever since Justinian's proclamation of the so-called 'Theopaschite formula' in 533, this issue had been the prize bone of contention between the Persian and Byzantine churches." See Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century", 59. Also see a historical and theological study of the Council of Constantinople II (533) by Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils,* 207-257.

> For as long as the Roman Empire was prospering in all its territory, the source of heresy was almost entirely checked. For those who were attributing suffering to the Self-Existing One were not allowed to raise their heads in public. From them, however, sprouted another evil shoot, which was [even] worse than them. I refer to the wicked Lulian, that one who established a cursed and wicked dogma concerning the dispensation of our Lord. [God, in his] grace, cast him out to a people with a hardened heart, the heretical Armenians. From that point, the vomit of that wicked man was received by them (fol. 143b).

The person referred to as 'Lulian' must be identical to the person of the same name who is mentioned in Babai's Christological work *On Union*. Babai states that Lulian had argued that "Our Lord did not take [i.e. united with] this mortal human body which suffers and dies, but [He took] that [body which] Adam [possessed] before he sinned, when he was immortal and non-suffering." Babai then adds that "Lulian, and the son of his father, Severus [of Antioch, d. 538 A.D.], were from two handmaids."[75] This evidence places Lulian firmly in the period before the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.

Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523 A.D.), an ascetic and theologian, wrote many polemic discourses against Nestorius and other Antiochean Fathers, which were in effect directed against the Christological views both of the Church of the East and of the Chalcedonians.[76] Decades later, Babai (d. 628 A.D.) would argue in his *Book of Union* against Philoxenus,[77] Lulian, and the emperor Justinian, who had pressured the bishops at the Council of Constantinople II (553 A.D) to anathematize the Antiochean Fathers and to adopt the Theopaschite Formula. Babai mentions one of his literary works against Justinian[78] in the *Book of Union*, where he states:

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[75] See Babai the Great, *Liber de Unione*, ed. and trans. Arthur Vaschalde, CSCO 79-80, (Paris: CORPUS, 1915), III, ch. 9.

[76] See *The Discourses of Philoxenus Bishop of Mabbogh (A.D. 485-519)*, ed. and trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, (London: Ashers & Co., Publishers, 1894); Philoxeni Mabbugensis, *Tractatus Tres De Trinitate Et Incarnatione*, ed. and trans. A. Vaschalde, (Paris: CORPUS, 1907); Philoxène de Mabbog, *Lettre aux moines de senoun*, (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1963). Also see, Lukas Van Rompay, "Bardaisan and Mani in Philoxenus of Mabbog's Memre against Habbib", in *Syriac Polemics*, eds. Wout Jac. Van Bekkum, Jan Willem Drijvers, and Alex C. Klugkist, (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 2007), 77-90.

[77] The Greek word *philoxenus* means "a companion of foreigners." Babai, in his polemic argument, calls him "*akhsnaya – akhsnay lashrara"* (a foreigner who is foreign from the truth). See Babai, III, ch. 9.

[78] Babai says in his *Book of Apology* (ܟܬܒܐ ܕܚܪܝܢܐ) that he "wrote down the whole wickedness and blasphemy [of Justinian] in eight books and [even] more." Babai further adds that his arguments were based "on Holy Scriptures,

> ... [F]ollowing these [heresies] sprouted the worst evil, which concealed in its evil all earlier [evils]: all of them were included in it, perfected in wickedness. This was strengthened by Justinian, the tyrant-emperor of Rome, and it has continued until now. For he became the reviver of the earlier wickedness of his predecessors, and he also added to their evil with disgusting blasphemies soiled with mud. [He became] the heir of [king] Saul, the murderer of the priests of God. Like Saul [he was] a soothsayer (*zakkuraya*; ܙܟܘܪܝܐ), but this one became more wicked than [Saul]. For this [Justinian], through his satanic bitterness, caused the wicked bishops in his empire to anathematize the truthful ones, the pillars of the Church who had departed in saintliness and apostolic orthodoxy many years earlier.[79]

This anathematization happened at the Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.). Davis shows that the Council's 12-14 canons anathematise the person and works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, certain works of Theodoret of Cyrus, and a letter of Ibas of Edessa.[80] Theodore was condemned on the basis of seventy-one excerpts from his works. An analysis of these seventy-one excerpts reveals that all of them were taken out of their original contexts at the Council's session, thus changing the meaning.[81] From the time of Narsai and Barṣawma in the mid-5th century, all of the major writers and synods of the Church of the East were consistent in their strong support of the Christology of the Antiochean Greek Fathers.

The Monophysite community in Mesopotamia was strengthened due to military conflict. Antioch was twice taken and sacked, first by Khosro I (531-579) in 540, and then by Khosro II (589-628) in 611, and thousands of Christians were taken as prisoners into Persia. As Moffett observes, "whole new cities were built for them, the best known of which was a second Gundeshapur near Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the 'better Antioch of Khosro's which was 'an exact model of the Syrian Antioch.'"[82] The number of Monophysites was further increased in

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[and on] references from all universal doctors (ܡ̈ܠܦܢܐ ܬܒ̈ܝܠܝܐ) and [from] those holy and blessed ones whom the wicked [Justinian] had attacked." See Babai, Bk. 3, ch. 9.

[79] See Babai, Bk. 3, ch. 9. Syr. 81-2.

[80] Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils,* 245. See also, *Eleven Ecumenical Councils,* ed. Paul Bedjan, (Leipzig: 1888), 83-7.

[81] Frederick G. McLeod. *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia,* (Washington, DC: CAAP, 2005), 206.

[82] Moffett cites al-Ṭabari, the well known Arab historian, who states that "the captives from Antioch found their way to their new homes in the reconstructed city without any need for directions." See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia,* vol. I*,* 246.

Mesopotamia with the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the Arab conquest of Byzantine territory in Syria. This allowed for a natural flow of migration eastward into Mesopotamia.[83]

Due to tensions with the Persian ruler,[84] there was a vacancy in the ‘Nestorian’ patriarchate from 608 to 628 A.D. It was during this period that, with the support of the Persian queen, the Monophysites would appoint their first bishops in Mesopotamia.[85] Eliyya of Nisibis informs us that “[b]y the agreement of Athanasius, the Patriarch, the Jacobites had assembled in the Monastery of Mar Mattai in the land of Nineveh, in the year 935 AG [= 624 A.D.), and ordained Marutha the first Metropolitan of Tekrit. They organized ten bishops under his authority. Later on, after building [the city of] Baghdad and al-Jazira, [the number] became twelve bishops.”[86] Ishoʿyahb (649-659), in his letter to Gabriel,[87] the metropolitan bishop, gives several reasons for the success and prosperity of the Monophysites. “The first and primary [reason] is the readiness of the current rulers to listen to those who approach them through the whispering of silver and through golden persuasions. The second is the multitude of their wicked helpers, those who previously belonged to their heresy, but who now are counted among those who are ruling. The third [reason] is the acceptance and prosperity of the people of Tikrit before the chiefs and rulers there. And the fourth, together with these, is the influence of Satan, which is stirring up the children of disobedience, those who do not resist [heresy] in the love of the truth through which they will live."[88]

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[83] See Witold Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē: A Study in the History of Historiography*, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia 9, (Uppsala: Acta Univ. Ups., 1987), 49.

[84] The election of Gregor I as Catholicos-Patriarch was not supported by the Sasanian king.

[85] Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, (New York: Longman Group Limited, 1986; repr. Malaysia: 1999), 12.

[86] Eliyya of Nisibis, *Opus Chronologicum*, I, 127. The “Chronique de séert, Deuxième partie (II)” in *Patrologia Orientalis*, ed. and trans. Addai Scher, (Paris: 1918; repr. Turnhout, Belgium: Editions Brepols, 1983), 542-3 [222-3], confirms the ordination of these ten bishops and indicates their assigned regions. The *Chronique de séert* also briefly explains, in one of its sections, “the reason for the spread of the Jacobites in the land of Persia”, 545 [225].

[87] Since Ishoʿyahb became a metropolitan by 639 A.D., his letter must have been written in the 630s.

It was not only the growth of new Monophysite communities that concerned the Church of the East in the early 7th century, but also the possibility that a Monophysite patriarch might be appointed to lead the latter. As Moffett notes, "Gabriel[89] and the [Christian] queen were manoeuvring the Shah to appoint a Monophysite as patriarch. Such a coup would amount to a legal seizure of the whole Nestorian Church by the Jacobites."[90] In response to this, the Nestorian bishops reacted by asking the king's permission to end the vacancy so that they may be able to ordain their own patriarch. In this context, a Christological debate between the two parties (the Nestorians and the Jacobites) was held in the court of the Persian emperor in 612. Each party claimed victory. However, Gabriel's accusation against George the monk, who became an apostate by denouncing the Zoroastrian religion, incited the king against the Nestorians, and he ordered the execution of George in 615 A.D.[91] Tension between the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of the East would continue, according to the Biography of Rabban Hormizd (d. ca. 670) and that of Rabban bar-ʿEdta, which states that the Monastery of Mar Mattai was seized through Gabriel's influence.[92] As Witakowski states, "[T]he relationship between the Monophysite and Nestorian Churches were not always friendly. They sometimes even demolished each other's churches."[93]

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[88] See Išōʿyahb [Ishoʿyahb] Patriarchate III, *Liber epistularum*, (Paris: CSCO, 11-12, 1905; repr. Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1955), B, no. 44.

[89] Gabriel of Shenʿar was the chief physician for the Persian king. He was anathematized by patriarch Sabrishoʿ (596-604 A.D.) for having a second wife. He became a Jacobite and a bitter opponent of the Nestorians. See "Khusiztan Chronicle", in *Chronica Minora: I*, ed. Ignazio Guidi, (Leipzig: 1903; repr. Louvain: Secrétariat de corpusSCO, 1960); also see Scher, *Chronique de séert*, II, 498 [178].

[90] See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia,* vol. I, 247.

[91] See "The Account of Mar Giwargis the Martyr" by Mar Babai in *Historire De Mar-Jabalaha*, *de trois autres patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques nestoriens*, ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1895), 416-571; See Scher, *Chronique de séert*, II, 536-539; and Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia,* vol. I*,* 251.

[92] See *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar-ʿIdta* [Bar-ʿEdta], ed. E. A. W. Budge, (London: Luzac, 1902). The biography of Rabban Bar-ʿEdta (d. 621 A.D.) informs us that the monks of the Monastery of Mar Mattai, along with Ishoʿsabran, their superior, abandoned their monstery to join the Monastery of Rabban Bar-ʿEdta. The reason for their departure is that West Syrian monks were about to seize the Monastery of Mar Mattai with the aid of Gabriel the physician of Khosro. Ibid., sec. 5, 137-8, and sec. 25, 157-9.

1.2.2 Messalianism

In *Resh Melle*, John provides a list of the founders of many heresies that had flourished before the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., including "Mani [*c.* 216-276], Marcion [d. *c.* 160], Valentinus [2nd cent.], Bardaisan [154-222], Sabellius [early 3rd cent.], Cathari [from Gr. *katharos*, "pure"], Barborians, [94] Arius [*c.* 256-336], Eunomius [early 4th cent.], Apollinarius [*c.* 310-*c.* 390], and the rest of other [heretics]."[95] He explains how they had divided the unity of the Church by "tearing the Body of Christ as greedy dogs into many divisions."[96] This list of early heresies in *Resh Melle* strongly suggests that he was even more aware of contemporary heresies. Even though *Resh Melle* makes no reference to Messalianism, the two synods mentioned below (576 A.D., and 790 A.D.) clearly show that Messalianism was still a living controversy during the seventh century.

Messalianism emerged from an ascetic sect which flourished in the mid-fourth century near the city of Edessa during the time of Julian *Sawa* (the elder). [97] This connection with the city of Edessa is also supported by Theodoret of Cyrus.[98] The name of this movement is based on the

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[93] See Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē,* 48.
[94] According to Barḥadbshebba (ca. 500 AD), this heretical group was known for its extremely unorthodox views of the Eucharist. See Barḥadbešabba. *La première partie de l'histoire ecclésiastique*, ed. and trans. F. Nau, *PO,* (Paris: 1932, repr. Turnhout: Editions Brepols, 1977), 14-15.
[95] See *RM*, fol. 137b.
[96] See *RM*, fol. 137b.
[97] See Theodore bar Koni, *Liber scholiorum I-II*, ed. Addai Scher, (Paris: CORPUS, 1910, 1912), bk. 11, 328-30. The same edition has been translated into French by Robert Hespel and René Draguet, (Louvain: Peeters, 1981, 1982), 245-7. Theodore bar Koni further states that certain ascetic persons were living at the edge of the city of Edessa: "Sawa, Dado, Dalap, Hurmizd, Shemʿon, and others were imitating the blessed Anthony, Macarius, and Julian sawa, [the latter] whose place was not distant from them." Julian Sawa is acknowledged by Theodoret as the founder of a community of monks in the 320s A.D. See Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of Monks of Syria*, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 23-36.
[98] See Theodoret of Cyrus, *Ecclesiastical History*, (London: 1843), bk. 4, ch. 11.

Syriac word *m-ṣalyane* (ܡܨ̈ܠܝܢܐ), which means ‘praying ones’. In Greek they are known as ‘Euchites’, which has the same meaning. According to Everett Ferguson, “[t]hey held that only intense and ceaseless prayer could eliminate the passion and desire by which demons held power over a person; consequently, they refused work and lived on alms.”[99] Theodore bar Koni says that the Messalians taught that baptism, the grace of Holy Spirit received through it, and the Eucharist are not enough to save a person. The Messalians “were attacked by Ephrem the Syrian, Flavian of Antioch, Amphilochius of Iconium, and Epiphanius, and were condemned at Antioch (ca. 385), Side (383), Constantinople (426), and Ephesus (431).”[100]

This heresy continued to flourish for at least two centuries in regions of Mesopotamia.[101] The Synod of Ezekiel in 576 A.D. decreed 36 canons.[102] It is interesting to note that the synod’s first canon is “On Messalians”, which surely reflects the magnitude of this controversy. The canon warns the faithful against the Messalians’ false form of ascetic teachings, since “they disregard the holy Eucharist, fasting, [canonical] prayer[s] and all [such things] through which God reconciles with sinners” (ܘܡܒܣܝܢ ܒܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܘܒܨܘܡܐ ܘܒܨܠܘܬܐ ܘܒܟܠܗܝܢ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܒܗܝܢ ܡܬܪܥܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܚ̈ܛܝܐ.). Furthermore, the canon excommunicates ordained ones from their office in the Church and prohibits them totally from mingling with the faithful while granting them a grace period of one year so that they may repent. However, if the accused ones are from the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant (i.e. monastic fellows), or were laypersons, they are given a six-month grace period in order to repent. Babai the Great (d. 628) wrote a work against the supporters of Qusṭa, who are referred to as ‘Messalians’ since they disregarded fasting, prayers and the reception of the holy Eucharist.[103] In 585 A.D., the Synod of Ishoʿyahb I, seems to be referring to the Messalians without actually naming them. Its 8th Canon declares, "Concerning those who disregard the Church's prayer and disregard the Sacraments of Christ, and who in false monastic dress they choose to wander without a monastery. They go around with women, or men and women dwell together in one monastery."[104]

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[99] See Everett Ferguson, “Messalians” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, eds. Everett Ferguson, Michael P. McHugh, and Frederick W. Norris, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 595.

[100] Ibid., 595.

[101] The heresy of Messalianism was active in the region of Arbela ca. 500 A.D. See *Die Chronik von Arbela*, ed. and trans. Peter Kawerau, (Louvain: In Aedibus E. Peeters, 1985), Syr. 76.

[102] See *Synodicon orientale*, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, (Paris: 1902), Syr. 110-29.

About two centuries later, the Synod of Timothy in 790 A.D.[105] also declares in its fourth canon regarding Messalianism: "Any person among the bishops, the ascetics and the faithful, who is charged in the heresy of Messalianism or [another heresy] whichever it is – is not authorized by the word of our Lord, to serve his office, or to participate in the Church and [its] sacraments before he anathematize before the general [public of the] Church concerning this evil teaching."[106] Since it is singled out by name among other heresies that may have existed at that time, Messalianism seems to have been considered to be particularly dangerous by Timothy's synod.

1.3 **The Church of the East**

The early Christian communities which flourished in the heartland of ancient Assyria and Babylonia formed into what later became known as the Church of the East (ܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ). This name is used three times by John in *Resh Melle*.[107] After briefly considering the historical development of this name, we shall turn to a general discussion the state of the Church of the East during the seventh century. In subsequent sections we shall explore its monastic life (section 1.4), the monastery of Yoḥannan of Kmol (section 1.5), and John's view of monasticism (section

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[103] See Scher, *Chronique de séert*, II, 532.
[104] See "The Synod of Ishoʿyahb", *SO*, Syr. 130-165.
[105] Ibid., Syr. 599-605.
[106] Ibid., Syr. 602.
[107] See *RM*, fols. 140a; 141a, 143a.

1.6). John affirms that the evangelization of Mesopotamia began in the time of the Apostles (see section 4.2.10.7), and also states that "[u]p to the time of the arrival of the children of Hagar the Church in Persia had been under the rule of the magians... This was the situation from the time of the Apostles up to the reign of this last Khosro..." (fol. 145a). John's declaration that the Church in Persia was apostolic is also confirmed by Ishoʿyahb III (649-659 A.D.), who wrote in one of his letters that "we were firm in [Christian] faith and true knowledge for six-hundred years, more or less".[108]

1.3.1 The Name "Church of the East" (ܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ)

The term 'church' in the phrase 'The Church of the East' does not designate in this context a place of worship, but is a reference to a distinct ecclesiastical group comprised of Christian communities that share certain traditions, history, rites, rituals, liturgies, dogmas and hierarchy. Of course, this same statement is true of all apostolic Christian Churches. Church names became a necessity in order to clearly identify a given tradition as distinguished from others. We read in the New Testament that the early Christian communities were addressed as "the church in Jerusalem" (Ac 11:22); "the church at Antioch" (Ac 13:1); "the church of God that is in Corinth" (2 Cor 1:1); "Your sister church in Babylon" (1 Pe 5:13), etc.

The earliest surviving sources which use the name 'Church of the East' are the extant records of the synods of the Church of the East, convened by the Catholicos-Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in the early 5th century. These documents must have been based on original records made at the time, but in their current form date from some time later.[109] They form part of the collection known as *Synodicon Orientale*, which was produced in the 8th century. The accounts of three synods will be surveyed here: the Synod of Isaac (410 A.D.), the Synod of Yab'alaha (420 A.D.) and the Synod of Dadishoʿ (424 A.D.). In these accounts, the exact phrase "the Church of the East" is absent, but the terms "church" and "east" are often used in close proximity.

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[108] Ishoʿyahb III, *Liber Epistularum*, P, no. 30.

[109] Certain scholars argue that the records of the early synods of the Church of the East have not survived in their original form but have been shaped by later redactors. For example, Gero argues that it is highly probable that Timothy I was the collector and redactor of the acts of the synod of Dadisho. See Stephen Gero, "The See of Peter in Babylon: Western Influences on the Ecclesiology of Early Persian Christianity," in *East of Byzantiu: Syria and*

1.3.1.1 The Synod of Isaac

In the introduction of this synod, we encounter the following expressions, some are repeated more than one time: "the churches of the Lord" (ܥܕܬ̈ܗ ܕܡܪܝܐ *SO*, 18, ln. 1); "the congregations of Christ" (ܟܢܘܫܬ̈ܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ *SO*, 18, lns. 1-2); "the churches of God" (ܥܕܬ̈ܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ *SO*, 18, ln. 4); "the parishes of Christ" (ܡܪܥܝܬ̈ܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ *SO*, 18, lns. 4-5); "all our churches and congregations in the East" (ܟܠܗܝܢ ܥܕܬ̈ܢ ܘܟܢܘܫܬ̈ܢ ܕܒܡܕܢܚܐ *SO*, 18, lns. 26-7); "Mar Isaac, the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Catholicos and the head of the bishops of the East" (ܡܪܝ، ܐܝܣܚܩ ܐܦܝܣܩܘܦܐ ܕܣܠܝܩ ܘܩܛܝܣܦܘܢ ܩܬܘܠܝܩܐ ܘܪܫܐ ܕܐܦܝܣ̈ܩܘܦܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ *SO*, 19, lns. 1-2); "the Church of Christ" (ܥܕܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ *SO*, 21, lns. 4-5); "[Yazdgard] made [Isaac] the supreme head over all the Christians in the East" (ܪܫܐ ܥܠ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܟܪ̈ܣܛܝܢܐ ܕܒܡܕܢܚܐ ܟܠܗ *SO*, 21, lns. 26-7). The only place where the title "the Church of the East" is indirectly referred to is in canon 13 of the same synod which discusses bishops and priests who practice different traditions: "Whoever dares, in his church and with his people, to celebrate the great day of Nativity, the Fast of Forty [Days], and the great day of Unleavened Bread [i.e. the Passover] on his own, [apart] from the agreement of the Church of the West and that of the East (ܡܢ ܫܘܠܡܬܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܥܪܒܐ ܘܕܡܕܢܚܐ *SO*, 27, ln.15), is to

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Armenia in the Formative Period, eds. N.G. Garsoïan, T.F. Mathews, and R.W. Thomson, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 45-51. See also Kyle Smith, "The Synod of Dādišoʿ - 424 CE," http://www.academia.edu/5098272/The_Synod_of_Mar_ Dādišo_424_CE [accessed October 30, 2014].

be excluded from [officiating] any service in the Church, as a wicked man who is to be expelled [from the priesthood] without mercy; he will not be healed [i.e. restored to the priesthood]."[110]

1.3.1.2 The Synod of Yab'alaha

In this synod, the same and similar concepts are found: "[T]he churches and the parishes of Christ in the entire East" (ܕܥܕ̈ܬܗ ܘܕܡܪ̈ܝܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܒܟܠܗ̇ ܡܕܢܚܐ *SO*, 37, ln. 10); "Mar Yab'alaha the Catholicos bishop and the head of the bishops of the East" (ܡܪܝ ܝܗܒܐܠܗܐ ܐܦܝܣܩܘܦܐ ܩܬܘܠܝܩܐ ܘܪܫܐ ܕܐܦܝܣܩ̈ܘܦܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ *SO*, 37, lns. 12-13); "the churches and congregations of Christ, those which are in the East" (ܥܕ̈ܬܗ ܘܟܢܘ̈ܫܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܢܝܢ ܕܒܡܕܢܚܐ *SO*, 37, lns. 16-17); "churches of Christ" (ܥܕ̈ܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ *SO*, 39, lns. 10-11).

1.3.1.3 The Synod of Dadishoʿ[111]

In this synod the following expressions are attested: "Mar Dadishoʿ, the Catholicos and the great head of the bishops and the leader of all Christianity of the East" (ܡܪܝ ܕܕܝܫܘܥ ܩܬܘܠܝܩܐ ܘܪܫܐ ܪܒܐ ܕܐܦܝܣܩ̈ܘܦܐ ܘܡܕܒܪܢܐ ܕܟܠܗ̇ ܟܪܣܛܝܢܘܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ *SO*, 43, lns. 6-7); "the Church of God" (ܥܕܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ *SO*, 44, ln. 3); "the Parish of Christ" (ܡܪܝܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ *SO*, 44, ln. 4); the Catholicos is

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[110] See the thirteenth canon in the "Synod of Isaac", *SO*, Syr. 27.

[111] A discussion of the importance of this synod may be found in Joseph Habbi, *Majamiʿ Kanisat al-Mashriq [Synods of the Church of the East]* (Kaslik, Lebanon: University of Holy Spirit, 1999). Here we provide two representative passages from this work: "The acts of the Synod of Dadishoʿ contain no reference to 'the Persians' and their rule; instead they are remembered as 'Magi' and reference is made to the Persian 'persecutions'. All these things confirm that the synod was convened at a neutral location, while 'others' are described as strangers. It is a reality which fits the Arab kingdom of al-Ḥira, or a place which is distant from Persian political influence. Thus, it is the first ecclesiastical synod where foreign influences played no role." [116] "We may discern two ways in which the synod of the Catholicos Dadishoʿ is important, the first being historical and the second ecclesiastical. With respect to its historical importance, the synod was able to solve ecclesiastical controversies and put an end to divisions and groups which were able to harm the Church of the East as it was emerging from the turmoil of harsh and bloody persecutions. For a complete period of renaissance requires the support of all groups and powers and the nourishment of Church activity on all levels. But [its] ecclesiastical importance lies in the fact that this synod identifies a definite period in which the ecclesiastical understanding and the place of the higher ecclesiastical authority are defined. Thus, it is the most important reference in the history of the eastern synods and in the history of the Church of the East in all times" [134].

"the distinguished confessor, our Father, our head, and the ruler of all the East" (ܡܘܕܝܢܐ ܢܨܝܚܐ ܐܒܘܢ ܘܪܫܢ ܘܡܕܒܪܢܐ ܕܟܠܗ ܡܕܢܚܐ *SO*, 44, lns. 15-16).

1.3.1.4 A Summary of the evidence of the early synods

The records of these three synods clearly reflect the early stages of the development of the name 'The Church of the East' without actually using the exact phrase. The synod of Isaac provides the clearest reference when it refers to "the Church of the West and the [Church] of the East." It is significant here that the term 'Church' is used, a singular form, to refer to one body with members both in the West and in the East. In many of above passages, one is tempted to see references to 'the Church of the East' as understood by later theologians, but at this early period, before the Councils of Ephesus (431 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451 A.D.), it has probably been intentionally avoided. At that time, all the churches (Christian communities) are incorporated into "the Church of God" (see Ac 20:28; 1 Co 1:2; etc.). Thus the above synods simply call the Christian churches (both of the East and of the West) "The churches and parishes of Christ" and the "churches of the Lord", reflecting a state of full communion among all Christian communities across the Roman and the Sasanian Empires.

1.3.1.5 Other references to "the Church of the East"

The phrase 'Church of the East' had already been in use for some time. For example, in the martyr acts attributed to Marutha of Maipharqaṭ we read: "The Church of the East laments over [her] shepherds and says, 'Where are my nobles and blessed ones? They are not at the head of their flocks.'"[112] Likewise, in one account of the martyrdom of Mar Shemʿon, he is referred to as

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[112] See "The first discourse: concerning the martyrs of the Land of the East", *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, (Paris: 1891; repr. Hildeshem: Georg Olms, 1968), vol. 2, 104.

"the Chief of the bishops of the Church of the East."[113] And by the mid-seventh century, Ishoʿyahb III (649-659 A.D.), the Catholicos-Patriarch, wrote a letter to the Church in Edessa. He refers to himself in its prologue as follows: "By the grace of God, Ishoʿyahb, the stranger, the slave and servant of the Catholic Church of the East..."[114]

1.3.1.6 John's use of the name "the Church of the East"

John uses the phrase "The Church of the East" (ܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ) three times in *Resh Melle*.[115] He uses it to denote the many Christian communities which flourished across the Sasanian Empire and in many regions of Asia. Following the Christological debates in mid-fifth century, these Christians became gradually known "Nestorians," and as members of "the Nestorian Church." These later titles were used by Christian authors within the Roman Empire to refer to the Church of the East and her communities since they had rejected the Council of Ephesus and the anathematization of Nestorius (431 A.D.).[116]

John's first use of "the Church of the East" is in folio 140a. It is clearly used in a context which reflects the many Christian communities that were flourishing within the Persian Empire. John emphasizes that, for a brief period, peace and tranquility were experienced by Christians in both the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire during the time of Jovian the Emperor:

> For the city of Nisibis was ceded to the Persians by Jovian the righteous Emperor instead of [i.e. to bring to an end] the blood of the churches of Christ, and in this way our Lord brought salvation to his Church. Immediately the Emperor [Jovian] commanded, 'Let the bishops return from their exile, let the gates of the churches be opened, and let the customary rituals be fully observed, let the faithful be in peace, and let the preachers preach the word of God without ceasing to both believers and unbelievers.' In the same way, these things [were implemented] in the Church of the East. Thus the holy [liturgy], which was

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[113] See "the Martyrdom of Mar Shemʿon and his fellow Martyrs," *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, (Paris: 1891; repr. Hildeshem: Georg Olms, 1968), vol. 2, 131.

[114] Išōʿyahb [Ishoʿyahb] Patriarchae III, *Liber Epistularum*, P, no. 22.

[115] See *RM*, fols. 140a; 141a; 143a.

[116] See section 4.2.9 for further discussion of the Christology of the Church of the East.

> humbled by the enemies of truth, was exalted, and became tranquility, and rest came to the churches of the West and of the East (fols. 140a-b).[117]

The second use of the phrase is attested at another context which again is a clear reference to the Christian communities in Persia, at a time when Christian orthodoxy were suffering persecution during the reigns of Emperors Valentinian I (364-375) and Valens (364-378) who supported Arianism.

> After [Jovian] arose a second Saul against the priests of God, the wicked emperor Valentinian [I], and Valens, that impious one... [T]he Church of the East alone escaped from their hands since it was under Persian rule and was holding firmly to the faith of the three hundred and eighteen [i.e the Nicene Creed]. However, her leaders were in great distress while observing the foolishness of the Arians, their boasting against the parish of Christ, and the exile of Episcopal Fathers. They were saddened and mournful on behalf of their brothers, but were unable to help them since they were prevented by the [Persian] rule which was imposed on them at that time (fols. 140b-141a).

John's third use of the phrase occurs in a discussion of the exile and the anathematization of Nestorius in the Council of Ephesus (431) and the confirmation of these decisions in the Council of Chalcedon (451). He states that "[s]ince the Church of the East was fully liberated from the wickedness of these two *puḥre*,[118] it remained established and firm in the true faith [signed] by the three hundred and eighteen [bishops at Nicea]" (fol. 143a).[119]

1.3.2 Institutions

By John's time, the Church of the East was well developed and had many institutions. These institutions included those of an administrative nature, such as the Church hierarchy and the synods that it organized, as well as educational ones such as school academies and monastic learning centres. John's life and literary works were shaped by such institutions.

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[117] A similar point is made at the end of the Syriac *Julian Romance*, where Eusebius, the bishop of Rome, is described as being "comforted in his old age by the re-opening of churches, the return of their priests, and the gathering of their members" after the death of Julian (see A Selection from the Syriac Julian Romance, ed. Richard J. H. Gottheil, (Leiden: Brill, 1906), 39. In John's *Resh Melle*, these things are framed as commands issued by Jovian himself. It remains unclear whether John had access to the *Romance* or to some other source with a similar account. See Jan Willem Drijvers, "Julian the Apostate and the City of Rome: Pagan-Christian Polemics in the Syriac *Julian Romance*", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta: Syriac Polemics*, (Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 1-20; and on "The Julian Romance" by Philip Wood, *We have no King but Christ: Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400-585)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 132-62.

[118] The term *puḥra*, from Akkadian *puḫru*, refers in Syriac to a "banquet" or a "pagan assembly."

[119] John uses the two forms ܐܫܬܪܪܬ ܘܡܫܬܪܪܐ from the root verb ܫܪܪ "to plant", "to establish" or "to make firm."

1.3.2.1 The Synod

The communities that formed the Church of the East within Mesopotamia had developed their own governing system similar to that of the main Churches within the Roman Empire. This hierarchy is clearly attested in the synods of the church, which represent the highest church authority and which legislates ecclesiastical canons on various topics.[120] Ecclesiastical leaders (metropolitans and bishops) would assemble at the patriarchal see in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. This assembly would be in response to a call made by the Catholicos. Bishops would arrive from near and distant regions in order to discuss various Church affairs, to reaffirm their unity, to confirm certain ecclesiastical doctrines or refute heretical teachings, and to issue canons concerning both the administration of the Church and Christian life.

According to the traditions in the Church of the East, this hierarchy became more centralized during the time of Papa (259-327 A.D.), the bishop of Seleucia who was the first to claim the title 'Catholicos'.[121] He was succeeded by Shemʿon the Martyr (327-344 A.D.),[122] and both these figures are given the title 'Catholicos' in later sources. By the 4th century, Christians in Persia would have had a variety of liturgical practices and celebrations.[123] This diversity is a consequence of the earliest notion of the role of the bishop, in which any Christian community headed by a local bishop constituted an 'ecclesia'. Gradually, bishops in important cities gained more authority and assumed greater leadership in the managing of the affairs of the wider Church. The situation in Persia was undoubtedly similar to that which held among Christian communities in the Roman Empire in the early centuries, where the bishops of important cities competed with each other in their claims of authenticity and primacy. Such would also have been the case in Persia among the bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Elam, and Kashkar.[124] It was during the tenure of Papa that an urgent need for peace in the Church made the office of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon more prominent, and the Church in Persia began to become more centralized. Over time, the Church of the East became more unified in its doctrine, liturgical practices and celebrations, new dioceses were created and their boundaries set, and the duties of various ecclesiastical administrators were specified. Subsequently, all of the faithful, from the ordinary members of the Church right up to the metropolitan bishops, looked upon the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon as their Catholicos-Patriarch and supreme leader.[125]

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[120] The principle goal of the Synods in the Church of the East, or that of the early Ecumenical Councils, was to affirm the Christian *koinonia* ("fellowship" and "communion") of the assembled ones, the Church, with the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), and among themselves. See on "Koinonia," *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, ed. Donald K. McKim, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 154.

[121] Eliyya notes that Ishoʿdnaḥ had claimed that Papa's tenure was 67 years. See Eliyya of Nisibis, *Opus Chronologicum*, I, 45.

[122] In his work *al-Majdal,* Mari bin Sulayman demonstrates that Shemʿon's tenure was 18 years. See, *De Patriarchis Nestorianorum: Commentaria*, by Maris Amri et Slibae, ed. Henricus Gismondi, (Rome: Excudebat C. De Luigi, 1899), 18.

[123] This variety of practices and celebrations is clearly attested in the Synod of Isaac in 410 A.D. See Chabot, *Synodicon orientale*.

The gathering of bishops in the synod of Isaac (410 A.D.) was made possible after King Yazdegard I issued his edict of toleration in 409 A.D.[126] The Christians' joy over the edict is reflected in the introduction of Isaac's synod, which refers to Yazdegard as "the victorious king."[127] The positive attitude toward the Persian ruler is a direct response to the latter's edict of religious tolerance and recognition of their leader.[128] This recognition of Christians on the part of Yazdegard took place in the context of good relations with the Byzantine emperor.[129] The Persian ruler may have also seen a real benefit in having the support of the large Christian community within Persia.

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[124] This argument is presented by Habbi in his extensive study and analysis of *The Synods of the Church of the East*. Habbi states that his translation is based on Chabot's edition of *Synodicon orientale*, and that he consulted the original Syriac manuscript at the Chaldean monastery, and many scholarly studies.

[125] For a thorough study of the patriarchal institution of the Church of the East, see Emmanuel Delly, *L'institution patriarcale dans l'Eglise Assyro-Chaldéenne*, (Rome: 1959; trans. into Arabic and repre. Baghdad: al-Mashreq, 1994). More recent surveys include Baumer, *The Church of the East*.

[126] See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia,* vol. I, 247. Procopius tell us that when Arcadius (383-408) asked Yazdgard I (399-420) to be the guardian of his son Theodosius, Yazdgard responded by writing to the Roman Senate to accept this task, threatening war against anyone who would attempt to form a plot against the new emperor. See Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; 3rd edition 2010), 94-5. The authors observe that "no military conflicts between Rome and Persia took place during the entire reign of Yazdgard I," (96).

The importance of Isaac's synod lies in its being the earliest whose canons have survived. Moreover, the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was established by king Yazdgard as "the supreme head over all the Christians in the East." In principle, this recognition would facilitate the gathering of the bishops into a synod when called by the Catholicos. In 410, Isaac the Catholicos presided over this assembly of bishops, whose names appear at the end of the canons along with their statement of assent.[130] The gathered bishops represented their own Christian communities, who were in full communion with the Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

The gathering of bishops under Catholicos Isaac in 410 established a pattern of centralized leadership which all subsequent synods would follow. These synods would establish and defend a single body of apostolic belief and practice, and thus functioned as the highest authority for the Church of the East.

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[127] See "Synod of Isaac", *SO,* Syr. 17, ln. 21. 'The victorious king,' *malka zakkaya* (ܡܠܟܐ ܙܟܝܐ) is also the title given to the Christian emperor Constantine the Great in many liturgical prayers of the Church of the East.

[128] The synod states that "[Yazdgard] made [Isaac] the supreme head over all the Christians of the East" (*SO*, Syr. 21, ln. 26-7).

[129] Scott McDonough argues that "[a]lthough Yazdgard would never be the second Constantine imagined by the bishops of the synods of 410 and 420, later Christian writers were forced to accommodate the rhetoric of hope invented by Yazdgard's contemporaries. Christian historians and hagiographers in Greek and West Syrian traditions ignored or minimized Yazdgard's culpability in the persections of his final year. For the Christians of the Church of the East, living under permanent non-Christian rule, the story of Yazdgard came to represent both the precarious nature of minority status in the medieval Near East and, paradoxically, the immense spiritual power vested in the leaders of the Church of the East." See "A Second Constantine? The Sasanian King Yazdgard in Christian History and Historiography" in *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1.1, (Balttimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 127-41.

[130] Forty bishops were invited, but some could not attend due to their old age, distance or illness.

1.3.2.2 Schools and Monastic Learning Centres

Educational instruction was deemed essential from the beginning of Christianity for teaching catechism to the faithful, which involved reading or hearing the Holy Scriptures. This kind of activity would have been part of the Christian movement from the beginning. Already in the second century A.D., authors such as Ignatius of Antioch (d. 117 A.D.), along with others who had studied philosophy such as Justin Martyr (d. 165 A.D.), Tatian (d. 185 A.D.) and Bardaiṣan (d. 222 A.D.), were involved in teaching in their respective Christian communities. The number of prominent Christian authors gradually began to increase due to Christian evangelization and the conversion of Constantine both in the East and in the West. Thus in the fourth and fifth centuries we meet Diodore of Tarsus (d. 390 A.D.), Ephrem of Edessa (306-373 A.D.), and Narsai of Nisibis (399-503 A.D.), all of whom are credited with the founding of their own schools and with an active involvement in teaching.

By John's time, the Church of the East had many schools and centres of learning. These schools were either under the jurisdiction of a diocese centre such as the School of Seleucia and that of the School of Nisibis, or they were educational centres within a monastery complex such as that of the Monastery of Beth ʿAbe and its school which was founded by Ishoʿyahb III (649-659 A.D.). Thomas of Marga states that a certain monk named Babai who lived during the tenure of Patriarch Ṣliba Zkha (713-728 A.D.) built sixty schools and assigned to them sixty teachers, who were his disciples.[131] More prominent schools continued to flourish during the seventh century, including the famous School of Nisibis, the School of Seleucia, the school at the great monastery of Abraham at Mount Izla, the school at the monastery of Beth ʿAbe in the region of Arbela, and the school at the Monastery of Rabban Shabur in Iran.

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[131] Thomas of Marga describes in brief a biography of Rabban Babai (not the Great) and provides the names of many schools which were founded by him. See Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors:The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga A.D. 840, 2 vols.*, ed. and trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, (London: Kegan Paul, 1893), bk. 3, chs. 1-3.

There were also schools that were attached to churches that would mainly teach catechism.[132] On learning and its importance, Timothy I (780-823) expresses the following in his letter to Sargis, the metropolitan of Elam: "Care for the school with all your soul. Remember indeed that it generates and nourishes children for the Church."[133] There is a particular connection with the School of Nisibis among the patriarchs of the Church of the East during the seventh century, most of whom either studied or taught at that institution.[134] Thus, Sabrishoʿ I (596- 604) studied at the School of Nisibis.[135] Grigor I (605-608), before his election to patriarchate, was a biblical teacher at the School of Selucia,[136] and later at the School of Nisibis.[137] Ishoʿyahb II (628-645),[138] Mar-Emme (647-650), [139] and Ishoʿyahb III (649-659) all studied at the School of Nisibis. Ishoʿyahb III was an important liturgical reformer who became first a monk in the Monastery of Beth ʿAbe.[140] Gewargis I (660-680)[141] was also a monk of the Monastery of Beth ʿAbe; the place of his studies was almost certainly the same as that of his predecessor. Ḥenanishoʿ I (685-692), who is referred to in *Resh Melle* as "the Interpreter" (fol. 150a), might also have studied at one of the above schools.[142] A connection to one or more of these schools was normal for most of the metropolitans, bishops, monks, priests during the seventh century. One cannot exclude the possibility that at least part of John's own education took place at the School of Nisibis, which after all was not far from his birth place, Penek.

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[132] The biographer of Mar Marouta says that "[the Nestorians] in each one of their villages had been careful to establish a school. They organized [these schools] so that chanting, melodies, hymns and such praises were to be uttered in the same way in [all] their [churches] everywhere." See Mar Denḥa, *Histoire des divines actions de saint Mar Marouta l'ancien*, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, 3, ed. and trans. F. Nau, (Paris: 1905), 62-96.

[133] "ܚܦܘܛ ܒܗ̇ ܕܐܣܟܘܠܐ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ̇ ܢܦܫܟ. ܐܬܕܟܪ: ܓܝܪ ܕܗܝ ܝܠܕܐ ܒܢ̈ܝܐ ܠܥܕܬܐ ܘܡܪܒܝܐ." See *Letters of Patriarch Timothy I*, (Trichur: Mar Nasai Press, 1982), 9-10. And, *Timothei Patriarchae I Epistulae*, ed. and trans. Oscar Braun, (CORPUS, 1914, 82-84.

[134] Winkler states that "[at the School of Nisibis], until the seventh century, almost every great East Syriac church leader and theologian received his education in reading, writing, rhetoric, philosophy, and above all exegesis in a carefully regulated three-year program of study." See, *The Church of the East: A Concise History*, eds. Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 26.

[135] See Sebastian P. Brock, "Sabrishoʿ I", in *GEDSH*, 355.

[136] See Lucas Van Rompay, "Grigor I", in *GEDSH*, 183. See Mari, *The Book of Majdal*, 60.

[137] Scher, *Chronique de séert,* II, 521-24.

[138] See Sebastian P. Brock, "Ishoʿyahb II of Gdala", in *GEDSH*, 218. See Mari, *The Book of Majdal*, 61. Scher, *Chronique de Séert*, II, 554-561.

[139] See Mari, *The Book of Majdal*, 62. Scher, *Chronique de Séert*, II, 629-30.

[140] See Sebastian P. Brock, "Ishoʿyahb III of Adiabene", in *GEDSH*, 218-19.

[141] See Lucas Van Rompay, "Gewargis I", in *GEDSH*, 175.

1.3.2.3 Missions

In *Resh Melle*, John is silent about any evangelization or Church missions in the seventh century. He does, however, criticize the Monosphysites for engaging in the wrong kind of evangelization: "[I]nstead of making disciples and baptizing the pagans according to the [normal] ecclesiastical canon, they began an irregular evangelization, and almost all the churches in Roman territory [i.e. Roman Syria] converted to their wickedness" (fol. 146b). This critique may reflect awareness on John's part that the Church of the East was involved in legitimate evangelization amongst the Gentiles.

He is aware, however, that Chistianity itself is a product of the early apostolic missions which were commissioned by Jesus (Mt 28: 16-19). Already in John's time, the Church of the East had outposts in far-flung regions such as China and India, it saw these missions as an ongoing expression of its apostolic origin, a reflection of its commitment to the preaching of the Gospel.[143] "An apostolic church is necessarily a missionary church."[144] Indeed, preaching seems to have been the motivation behind many missionary activities of the Church of the East. Missionaries to al-Ḥira, India, and China, for example, were most likely commissioned by the Catholicos-Patriarch or had his support. David, bishop of Basrah abandoned his office in the

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[142] Without naming his source, Baum states that "A *memra* (verse homily) [by Ḥenanishoʿ] on his teacher Ishoʿyahb III is preserved in an eighteenth-century manuscript." See Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East,* 45.

[143] See section 4.2.10.6 for a discussion of John's belief that the Christian Church is apostolic.

[144] See Patros Yousif, "An Introduction to the East Syrian Spirituality" in *East Syrian Spirituality*, ed. Augustine Thottakara, (Kerala: St. Joseph's Press, 1990), 55.

290s A.D. to pursue missionary activity in India.[145] His mission must have been blessed by his Catholicos-Patriarch and would have included other members. Later on, in 345 A.D., the Catholicos of the Church of the East appointed Joseph of Edessa as bishop of India.[146]

The Arab Christian community at al-Ḥira was represented by its bishop Hoshaʿ (Hosea) at the Synod of Isaac 410 A.D.,[147] which implies that a considerable Christian community already existed there at that time. The burial place of many patriarchs of the Church of the East is at al-Ḥira, which clearly reflects the special status which it enjoyed. [148] It is also possible that the Synod of Dadishoʿ in 424 A.D. (which is said to have been convened at *markabtha dṭayyaye*, 'the camp of the Arabs') was in al-Ḥira to avoid direct Sasanian and Zoroastrian influence. If this was the case, it is not acknowledged in the text itself. Rather, the issue of the interference of "western fathers" is a major concern.[149]

As mentioned above, al-Ḥira was the capital of the Lakhmid dynasty. ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis states that an Arab dynasty began in al-Ḥira in 418 AG (= 107 A.D.).[150] The Arab king al-Nuʿman (400-418 A.D.) was a pagan and persecuted his Christian subjects even as Christianity was spreading into his palace.[151] In the 6th century, a Church mission to al-Ḥira resulted in the conversion of the king and his court. Shemʿon, the bishop of al-Ḥira, Sabrishoʿ the bishop of

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[145] See *Chronique de Séert: première partie*, ed. and trans. Addai Scher, (Paris: 1907; repr. Turnhout, Belgium: Editions Brepols, 1981), 292.
[146] See Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 53.
[147] *SO*, Syr. 36.
[148] In his *Book of the Bee*, Solomon of Baṣra (13th Cen.) states that the following six patriarchs were buried at al-Ḥira: Dadishoʿ (421-456), Babowai (457-484), Aba the Great (540-552), Ḥazqiel (567/70-581), Ishoʿyahb I (581-595), Sabrishoʿ (596-604). See Solomon of Baṣra, *The Book of the Bee*, ed. and trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 132-3. There is no doubt that Al-Ḥira played a crucial role in the Church of the East after its conquest by the Arabs. Many Church leaders at al-Ḥira were bilingual in Arabic and Syriac. They were also familiar with a number of Greek philosophical works through their Syriac translations.
[149] A discussion of this question may be found in Habbi, *Majamiʿ Kanisat al-Mashriq*, 38.
[150] ʿAbdishoʿ says, "the kingdom of the house of Naṣer, Christian Arab kings, who ruled in the land of al-Ḥira in the year 418 AG [= 107A.D.]. Their first king [was] Gdima (ܓܕܝܡܗ) bin Malek, he ruled 118 years [i.e. dynasty?]. And their last [king], Nuʿman bin Munḍer, he ruled twenty-two years. And this kingdom ended in the year 912 AG [= 601 A.D.]" ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis. *The Order of Ecclesiastical Regulations*, bk. 1, ch. 10, (fol. 30b).
[151] Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia,*vol. I, 276.

Lashom (the future Catholicos), and the monk Ishoʿ-zkha, were all involved, undoubtedly under the direction and blessing of the Catholicos-Patriarch Ishoʿyahb I (581-595 A.D.).[152] The *Chronicle of Séert* states that these three were responsible for the healing of the Arab king Naʿman.[153] A biography of Sabrishoʿ the Catholicos (596-604) describes how king Naʿman and his officials renounced their gods, destroyed their idols, and submitted to baptism.[154]

The mission to China took place in 635 A.D., in the early years of the Tang Dynasty. This event occurring during the tenure of Ishoʿyahb II (628-645 A.D.), who witnessed the fall of the Sasanian dynasty and the conquest of Mesopotamia by the Arabs.[155] A record of this mission and the subsequent history of the Christian community in China came to light with the discovery of the so-called "Nestorian Monument", a massive stele that was uncovered in 1623 A.D., near the ancient capital city of Hsian (Xian).[156] The inscription on the monument includes text in both Chinese and Syriac. It declares that it was erected in 781 A.D., and traces the history of the community back to the arrival of the first missionary in the Chinese capital in 635 A.D.[157] These early missionaries made their way through the Silk Road into China and most probably they were introduced to the Chinese officials by Nestorian Christian merchants. This mission was successful in building the first Christian church in China in 638 A.D.,[158] and translated many Christian texts into Chinese. In 690, Empress Wu Hou established a new dynasty in her own name. She was anti-Christian and pro-Buddhist and declared Buddhism the state religion in 691.

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[152] See "Ishoʿyahb I", *The Book of Majdal*, 55-57.
[153] Scher, *Chronique de Séert*, II, 468-9.
[154] See "The Account of Mar Sabrishoʿ" in *Historire De Mar-Jabalaha, de trois autres patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques nestoriens*, ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1895), 288-331.
[155] Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 64-5.
[156] Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia,* vol. I, 288.
[157] Ibid., 288.
[158] Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 8-9.

This encouraged persecution against the Christians, which intensified in 698, when a church or monastery was sacked in the eastern capital Lo-yang.[159]

Written slightly after the beginning of the mission to China, the letters of Ishoʿyahb III (649-659 A.D.) attest to a community of the Church of the East in Jerusalem.[160] His jurisdiction over the Christians of the Indian Malabar coast is clearly established by 650 A.D.[161]

Thus a range of sources, including the letters of Ishoʿyahb III and of Timothy I (780-823 A.D.) and the *Chronicle of Seert*, testify concerning the involvement of the Church of the East in extensive missionary activities.[162] Church of the East missions into the west of Mesopotamia declined after the rise of Islam, which may have spurred on its expansion in the Far East. Centuries later, the European traveler Marco Polo testifies to the size of the communities which he refers to as "Nestorian" across Central Asia and China.[163]

1.3.3 Influence of the Political and Religious Context

Within Persian Mesopotamia, the Christian communities of the Church of the East were at first subject to Sasanian rule, and later found themselves under Arab rule. Though the Church would experience times of peace and tranquility under both regimes, there were also periods of persecution, suffering and oppression.

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[159] Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia,* vol. I, 293-95.

[160] Concerning the letter of Ishoʿyahb to the Jerusalemites, see *Išōʿyahb [Ishoʿyahb] Patriarchae III: Liber Epistularum*, P, no. 13. Wilhelm Baum adds: "The ruins of an East Syriac monastery with a mosaic inscription have been found between Jericho and the Jordan. He adds that in 1165 John of Wurzburg referred to Jerusalem's 'Nestorian' community, which in the mid-thirteenth century included four churches in the city. "In the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Church of the East had its own altar to the left of the sacred tomb." See Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 62-3.

[161] See Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 53.

[162] See the letters of Ishoʿyahb, *Išōʿyahb Patriarchae III: Liber Epistularum*; and the letters of Timothy I, *Timothei Patriarchae I Epistulae*.

[163] See Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, 2 vols., trans. and ed. Henry Yule, (London: J. Murray, 1903, 3rd ed.).

1.3.3.1 The Sasanian Context

With the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine to Christianity and the signing of Rome's first Edict of Toleration in 313 A.D., it is reasonable to assume that Christians in the Persian Empire were more likely to be accused of sympathizing with the enemy.[164] According to Eusebius, Constantine wrote to Shapur II concerning the Christians within Persia: "Since you are so powerful and pious, I commend them to your care, and leave them in your protection."[165] However, Christians in Persia began to be persecuted following Constantine's death in 337 A.D.[166] The intensity of this persecution, at least in the early 340s, is clearly reflected in the writings of Aphrahaṭ.[167]

Throughout the Sasanian period, if Persian relations with Rome deteriorated, the position of Christians in Persia could become tenuous. For example, the biography of Aba the Catholicos (540-552 A.D.) describes how Magian priests went before the Persian king and accused the Catholicos:

> He neither considers you amongst the kings and rulers, nor honours your great and glorious kingdom. [The Catholicos] was received with great honours when he went to *Fars* and the eastern territories of your empire. He condemns and despises the Magian religion which is given by Hurmizd the god, and through which your empire is administered. He abolishes and deprives it, and turns many Magians to Christianity. He diminishes our religion and magnifies his own. He holds us, the chiefs of Magi, as nothing. In brief, he is a companion of Caesar and an enemy of your kingdom.[168]

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[164] See Dignas and Engelbert, 221, for a summary of the standard view.

[165] See Eusebius of Caesarea, "The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine", NPNF, vol. 1, 4:9-13. Also see "The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, NPNP, vol. 3, 1:24; and "The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen", NPNF, vol. 2, 2:15.

[166] The traditional understanding in the Church of the East sees a connection between Constantine's death and the beginning of persecution, and understanding reflected in one of the accounts of the martyrdom of Simon Bar Ṣabbaʿe: "But immediately upon the death of the triumphant Constantine, Shapur, the king of the Persians, began to harass the Christian people, to afflict and persecute the preists and the *qyama*, and to destroy the churches in all of his realm." See Kyle Smith, *The Martyrdom and the History of Blessed Simon Bar Ṣabbaʿe*, 70.

[167] Aphrahaṭ states, "I have written this letter to you... in the thirty-sixth year of Shapur, king of Persia [i.e. 345 A.D.], who has stirred up persecution, and in the fifth year after the churches had been uprooted, and in the year in which there was a great ravaging of martyrs in the land of the east..." See "Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes", in *Patrologia Syriaca*, ed. and trans. I. Parisot, F. Nau, M. Kmosko, (Paris: 1907), bk. 23.69, 149-50.

[168] See "The Biography of Mar Aba," in *Historire De Mar-Jabalaha, de trois autres patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques nestoriens*, ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1895), 206-74.

Sasanian rule over Mesopotamia continued until the 630s, when it collapsed completely with the Arab conquest.[169] Sasanian intervention in the interior Christian affairs of the Church of the East had been a reality since at least the 4th century, during the time of the Catholicos Shemʿon the martyr. Persian authorities undoubtedly were also concerned that their Christian subjects might come to the aid of their enemy, the now Christian Roman Empire.[170] A new phase of church-state relations is reflected in the accounts of the Synod of Isaac, where we read that Isaac was affirmed by the ruler Yazdgard as the supreme head over all the Christians in the East. By this acknowledgement, the Sasanian ruler clearly recognized the important role of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, a leader who represented many large and growing Christian communities.

Persian kings would typically be involved in the election of a new patriarch. With this involvement, the king was not promoting Christianity, but anticipating that his assistance would be rewarded with the loyalty of the patriarch, particularly when the king himself was in need of support. This was particularly the case when the power of the Zoroastrian priesthood challenged the king’s authority.

The Persian king Hormizd IV (579-590) secured the election of Ishoʿyahb I as Catholicos patriarch. However, with the succession of Khosro II (590-628) to the Persian throne, Ishoʿyahb I, who had no desire to cooperate with the new king, fled to al-Ḥira to seek refuge in the court of its Christian king al-Nuʿman III ibn al-Mundhir (580-602). Khosro had come to power in the face of a revolt on the part of Varharn, and had sought and received military help from Maurice, the Byzantine emperor at the time. The *Khuzistan Chronicle* relates that Maurice reproved Khosro for not bringing the patriarch with him when he first came to him asking for help. The

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[169] *RM*, fols. 143b-44a; see also section 1.1. above.

[170] See above (1.3.1.6) concerning this belief as expressed by John; for the accusations of the Magian priests against Mar Awa, see section 1.3.3.1.

Chronicle says that the main reason that Ishoʿyahb I refrained from accompanying the king was his concern that if Varharn was successful, Christians would have suffered under his rule. He went to al-Ḥira, seeking refuge under the Arab king al-Nuʿman III ibn al-Mundhir (580-602), who had recently converted to Christianity.[171] As things turned out, the Persian-Byzantine coalition led by Khosro forced Varharn to flee to Azerbaijan, where he was defeated. This episode illustrates quite clearly that patriarchs needed to be very careful in their political allegiances. Ishoʿyahb I remained in al-Ḥira until his death in 596, when a great funeral ceremony was held at a new monastery being established by the king's sister, Hind the youngest.

In 596, Sabrishoʿ I (596-604 A.D.) was appointed by as bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and thus Catholicos-Patriarch by Khosro, after the latter had refused to confirm any name from a list of five other candidates which had been presented to him by the bishops.[172] Sabrishoʿ was highly honoured by the Sasanian king during his tenure. Syriac sources report that Sabrishoʿ corresponded with emperor Maurice, who was on good terms with the Sasanian king. In one of his letters, he asked the Maurice to release the prisoners of Arzen (ܐܪܙܘܢ) and Nisibis in exchange for the release of Roman prisoners in Persia.[173] It is reported that upon the murder of Maurice by his rivals, Sabrishoʿ was taken by king Khosro on his campaign against the Romans in 603/4 to revenge the murder of Maurice. The accounts reports that here Sabrishoʿ died at the Persian siege of Dara.[174] The *Khuzistan Chronicle*[175] reports that during this campaign,

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[171] *Chronica Minora*, I, Syr. 17. However, the *Chronicle of Séert* states that Ishoʿyahb's flight to al-Ḥira was immediately after Khosro's victory against Warharn.

[172] See Maris Amri et Slibae, *De Patriarchis Nestorianorum: Commentaria*, ed. Henricus Gismondi, (Rome: Excudebat C. De Luigi, 1899), 57-60.

[173] On these letters, see Maris Amri et Slibae, *De Patriarchis Nestorianorum: Commentaria*, ed. Henricus Gismondi, (Rome: Excudebat C. De Luigi, 1899), 59; on the exchange of gifts between Emperor Maurice and the Catholicos, see "The Account of Sabrishoʿ," in *Histoire de Mar – Jabalaha, de trois autres Patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques, nestoriens*, ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris/Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1895), 288-331.

[174] See Mari, *The Book of Majdal*, 60.

Nathaniel, the bishop of Syrzor (ܫܝܪܙܘܪ), along with the Christians of the city revolted against Rad, the Sasanian official and expelled him. The latter then went to Nisibis, where king Khosro was encamped, to complain against the Christians. As a result, Nathaniel was brought before the king and accused of inciting the revolt. He was imprisoned for six years, and then crucified. The Chronicle concludes, "Even though Khosro displayed an appearance of love towards the Christians because of [emperor] Maurice, [in reality] he was an enemy of our [Christian] people."[176]

The Persian kings often took patriarchs on their military campaigns. The reasons for this are not clear in our sources. Perhaps the Persian king hoped that a patriarchal presence would have an effect on Christians within Persia and Roman Syria, making it less likely that they would side with the Roman army. More likely is the possibility that the presence of a patriarch on a military campaign was for diplomatic reasons, i.e. to facilitate negotiation with the Christian enemy. This was a long-established practice among Sasanian rulers.[177] A 7th century example of this pattern is found in Ishoʿyahb II, who, according to the Chronicle of Seert, was commissioned to negotiate a peace treaty with the Romans. Near the end of Sasanian rule, under threat from Arab forces, King Siroes (Shiroy; ܫܝܪܘܝ) asked Ishoʿyahb II to choose a delegation from among his metropolitans and bishops of the eastern region (ܐܘܚܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ), and, fully financed by the state, to deliver letters and greetings from the king to the Byzantine emperor, and establish a

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[175] See the *Khuzistan Chronicle*. The full title of this work is "Various ecclesiastical (ܐܩܠܣܝܣ̈ܛܝܩܝܐ) accounts, that is, church histories, and cosmological (ܩܘܣܡܘ̈ܣܛܝܩܝܐ) [accounts], that is, secular universal histories, from the death of Hurmizd son of Khosro, until the end of reign of the Persians." This work can be found in *Chronica minora*, I, Syr.15-39.

[176] See "*Khuzistan* Chronicle", in *Chronica Minora*, I, Syr. 21.

[177] The *Chronicle of Seert* confirms this custom of the Sasanian authorities commissioning Christian delegations to Byzantine. "Yab-ʻalaha had delivered [king] Yazdgard's letter to [emperor] Theodosius; Aqaq had delivered the letter of Melis to emperor Zeno; and Paul the metropolitan of Nisibis who delivered the letter of Khosro, the son of Qwad to Justinian the Byzantine emperor." See Scher, *Chronique de séert*, II, 557.

permanent peace between the two empires.[178] Other Syriac sources reports that it was Queen Boran who had commissioned the Patriarchal delegation[179] to negotiate a peace treaty with the Byzantine emperor Heraclius.[180]

After the death of Sabrishoʿ in 604, the bishops elected Grigor I (605-608). Khosro was shocked upon seeing Grigor of Mishan as the new Catholicos instead of Grigor of Nisibis, the favourite of the king and of the faithful.[181] Upon the death of Grigor of Mishan, the king pledged that he would not permit the Christians to elect a new leader as long as he was alive. This resulted in two decades of vacancy in the patriarchate (608-628 A.D.). Following the death of Khosro, Ishoʿyahb II (628-645 A.D.) was elected, and soon witnessed the end of the Sasanian empire and the rise of the Arabs.

As far as we can tell, the Church of the East held only two synods in the seventh century. This low number can be attributed to the political instability which characterized this era.[182] This instability within the Persian Empire would prevent bishops from travelling as much as they might have in times of peace, and the calling of a synod would have been much more difficult.

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[178] See Thomas of Marga, bk. 2, ch. 4.

[179] Thomas of Marga says that this delegation consisted of Ishoʿyahb II, Cyriacus of Nisibis, Paul of Adiabine, Gabriel of Kirkuk (ܟܪܟܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܣܠܘܟ), and many scholarly bishops, including (the future Catholicos) Ishoʿyahb III and Sahduna. The *Chronicle of Khuzestan* states, however, that the Catholicos-Patriarch Ishoʿyahb II was accompanied by Cyriacus of Nisibis, Gabriel of Beth Garmai (ܟܪܟܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܓܪܡܝ), and Maruta of Gusṭra (ܓܘܣܛܪܐ), 30.

[180] The queen's commissioning of the Patriarchal delegation was "to renew the peace [treaty with the Byzantine emperor]. See Mari, *The Book of Majdal*, 61-2. Also see *Khuzistan Chronicle*, 30.

[181] The election of Grigor of Mishan took place as a result of a plot by the Christian queen Shirin and Gabriel the chief physician. She asked the bishops to elect Grigor of Mishan and claimed that this was "the order of the king." "On Grigor" see Mari, *The Book of Majdal*, 60-61. The *Khuzistan Chronicle*, states that Grigor of Parthia who was the queen's native and favour, was ordained Catholicos-Patriarch, and not Grigor of Kashkar, who was the king's favour and that of the Church's faithful, 22.

[182] Normally, the newly elected Catholicos-Patriarch would call a synod soon after his election. Later traditions, would stipulate that such assemblies should be called every four-years. No synods were convened during the tenures of the following seventh century Patriarchs of the Church of the East: Ishoʿyahw II (628-646), Mareemmeh (646-649), Ishoʿyahb III (649-659), Ḥnanishoʿ I (685-92/700), and John the Leper (692-693). The lack of synods during this period is perhaps not surprising given the The Sasanian civil war during 630s and 640s, the Arab civil war during 680s, and the controversy over the leadership of John the Leper (see footnotes 193 and 194, below). One wonders, however, why there was no synod during the tenure of the energetic Catholicos-Patriarch Ishoʿyahb III (649-659)?

The Synod of Grigor (605 A.D.) was attended by the Catholicos and only twenty-nine archbishops and bishops. Even more drastically, the Synod of Giwargis (George, 676 A.D.) was attended by the Catholicos and a mere seven archbishops and bishops. In 612 A.D., during the patriarchal vacancy, a number of bishops convened a conference in order to discuss important church affairs and to stand against contemporary challenges.[183]

1.3.3.2 The Arab Context

With the collapse of the Sasanian empire, the Church of the East in Mesopotamia came under Arab rule. Since the Christians during the Sasanian period had experienced oppression and even suffered state persecutions, this political change was seen, at least at first and at least by some, as a major relief, a deliverance wrought by divine intervention. John comments on this political transition as follows:

> We should not think that their arrival was ordinary, for it was a divine act. And before calling upon them, He proceeded and prepared them such to hold the Christians in honour. Likewise they had a certain command from God concerning our monastic order to hold in honour (fol. 144a).

Muḥammad himself is said to have negotiated a treaty with Sayyid, king of Najran, and the East Syriac bishop Abu-al-Harith of Najran, to secure certain privileges for Christians upon payment of the poll tax, and the exemption of priests and monks from this payment.[184] Some three decades before John's *Resh Melle* was written, the Catholicos-Patriarch Ishoʿyahb III (649-659) described the rule of the Arabs as follows:

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[183] See our discussion above in section 1.2.

[184] See Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 42. The *Chronicle of Seert* reports that the people of Najran had endorsed Christianity. It states that a certain Ḥannan, a famous merchant from Najran, had travelled to Constantinople and Persia. When he passed into al-Ḥira and met with Christians there, he was baptized and lived for a time there. Then, he returned to Najran and began to proclaim the Gospel. See Scher, *Chronique de seert*, II, 330-331.

> For these *ṭayyaye* [ܛܝ̈ܝܐ ; Arabs], to whom God has granted rule over the world in this age, are among us, as you know. It is not only that they are not against Christianity, but [they] praise our faith and honour our priests and the holy ones of our Lord, and support our churches and monasteries [185]

In this letter, however, Ishoʿyahb also blames Shemʿon (bishop of Rewardashir) for allowing his flock of *maronaye*/*marwanaye* (ܡܪ̈ܘܢܝܐ)[186] to convert to Islam:

> Where are your children, O deprived Father? Where are your sanctuaries, O feeble bishop? Where are the great people of the *marwanaye*, those who neither saw sword, nor fire, nor torture, but like fools were seized by the love of half of their possessions...[187] The *marwanaye* say that the Arabs did not compel them to abandon their [Christian] faith, but they had only required them to leave half of their possessions and to keep their faith. The *marwanaye* however, abandoned the faith forever and retained half of [their] possessions [for their] short lives. The faith that all the nations have purchased and are purchasing by the blood of their necks, and through which are inheriting everlasting life, your *marwanaye* did not purchase by [even] half of their possessions![188]

The statement by Ishoʿyahb is important since it reveals that by the mid-seven century, the Christians in Rewardashir (which was northeast of the Persian Gulf) were renouncing their faith because of the burden of taxes under Arab rule.[189]

It is not surprising that some Christians would have felt compelled to convert, given the potential of violence against their communities in this time of political transition. The *Khuzistan Chronicle* reports that when the Arab general Abu Musa[190] went up against the Sasanian general Hurmuzdan, the latter tried to persuade the Arabs to cease from taking captives and causing destruction. He negotiated a two-year peace treaty, ostensibly to allow him to gather tribute, but in fact he was planning to gather his forces. Trusting his city walls, Hurmuzdan broke the peace treaty. He killed those negotiating between the two parties, among whom was Giwargis the bishop of AWLY (ܐܘܠܝ), and imprisoned Abraham the metropolitan of Pratt (Basrah). He sent a large force against the Arabs, but it was destroyed.[191] The Chronicle also describes how the Arabs laid siege of the city of Shushtre and spilled blood like water. They killed “the Interpreter of the city” (ܡܦܫܩܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ) and the bishop of Hurmizd Ardashir along with the students, priests and deacons. Their blood was spilled in the church sanctuary.[192]

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[185] See Išōʿyahb [Ishoʿyahb] III, P, no. 14, 251. Since this letter is grouped with those written while Ishoʿyahb was Catholicos-Patriarch, it must have been written between 649-659 A.D.

[186] The identity of this group has not been determined. For a brief discussion and further references, see Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 181, n. 28, and 188, n. 43.

[187] See Išōʿyahb [Ishoʿyahb] III, P, no. 14, 248.

[188] Ibid., 249.

[189] The collected letters of Ishoʿyahb III, are divided into three groups (B, M and P), representing the three stages of his ecclesiastical career (i.e. bishop, metropolitan, and patriarch). The letter in question is the fourteenth in the last group, and thus was written while Ishoʿyahb was the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East (i.e., 649-659).

[190] Eliyya of Nisibis notes that the military campaigns of Abu-Musa al-ʻAshʿari against the Sasanian cities were in the years 643-44 A.D. See Eliyya of Nisibis, *Opus Chronologicum,* I, 134-5.

Like the Sasanians, Arab rulers also intervened in the inner affairs of the Church of the East. In *Resh Melle*, John states that there was instability in Mesopotamia in the 680s, since both Arab groups, the Westerners and the Easterners, claimed the city of Nisibis as theirs.[193] During this period of Arab civil war,[194] the Christian communities of the Church of the East experienced unrest and fear, as the final sections of *Resh Melle* indicate. John expresses sorrow over the fact that John, metropolitan of Nisibis, accompanied Bar-Zayaṭ in his campaign against the *ʿAqulaye* (i.e. inhabitants of Kufa) in order to convince Bar-Zayaṭ to depose Ḥnanishoʿ and establish himself as Catholicos-Patriarch in his place.[195] John then goes on to describe in general terms the aftermath of the civil war in the year (67 AH = 686 A.D.). Various natural disasters, such as famine and plague, are interpreted as divine punishment for the sins of the Christian community.

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[191] See “Khuzistan Chronicle”, in *Chronica Minora*, I, Syr. 36.

[192] Ibid., 37.

[193] According to John (*RM*, fol. 149b), the Easterners claimed Nisibis because it formerly belonged to the Persians, while the Westerners claimed it because it had belonged to the Romans. The conflict which he refers to here occurred in the 680s, and should not be confused with the earlier Arab civil war in 650s A.D.

[194] The Chronicle of Zuqnin states that when Marwan, the Caliph died [685 A.D], “He was succeeded by ʿAbd-al-Malik, who ruled for twenty-one years. In his time, civil war broke out lasting nine years because the Arabs did not want to submit to one single leader. During these nine years, they did not cease from battles and evils.” See Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 147.

[195] *RM*, fols. 149b-150a. Eliyya of Nisibis states that Ḥnanishoʿ was ordained in 67 AH (= 685 A.D.). Seven years later, in 74 AH (= 692 A.D.), John the metropolitan of Nisibis went to ʿAbd-al-Malek bin Marwan seeking to be Catholicos instead of the legitimate Ḥnanishoʿ. John of Nisibis was established as Catholicos-Patriarch by force, and Ḥnanishoʿ was exiled. He lived in the monastery of Mar Yonan, near the city of Mosul, and died in 82 A.H. (= 700 A.D.). See Eliyya of Nisibis, *Opus Chronologicum, I*, 55. The said monastery was taken by the Muslims and a Mosque was built on the site. It became known as the “Mosque of abi Younis” (i.e. Jonah, the prophet). In July of 2014, this mosque was destroyed by extremist Muslims. ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis states however, “And like Beth-Ḥannaya [monastery/church] in the region of Mosul, where Ḥnanishoʿ, the Catholicos is placed” (ܘܐܝܟ ܕܒܝܬ ܚܢܢܝܐ ܕܒܐܬܪܐ ܕܡܘܨܠ ܕܣܝܡ ܒܗ ܡܪܝ, ܚܢܢܝܫܘܥ ܩܬܘܠܝܩܐ). See “On Monasteries and [their state] of liberty”, in *The Concise Collection of Synodical Canons*, bk. 7, ch. 6.

However, in another *memra* which is also attributed to John, ‘On Rogation’ (ܥܠ ܒܥܘܬ݂ܐ; *ʿal baʿutha*),[196] reference is made to the *Bnai-Hagar* (ܒܢ̈ܝ ܗܓܪ; *the children of Hagar*), which obviously denotes the Arabs. In this *memra*, John laments over the suffering of his Christian people. His description reveals the magnitude of oppression that was witnessed by him. He reports the looting and destruction of cities, villages, and fields, the massacre of elders, infants and youth, and the taking of captives. He also states that those who had fled to the mountains suffered hunger and death. John’s description strongly suggests that the Arabs’ attitude towards the Christians in Mesopotamia was changing, and could no longer be described as tolerant. An echo of this shift can be seen in *Resh Melle* itself:

> He summoned against us the Barbarian kingdom – a people that is not open to persuasion, which acknowledges no treaty or agreement, which accepts no flattery or blandishment, whose comfort lies in blood that is shed without reason, whose pleasure is to dominate everyone, whose wish it is to take captives and to deport. Hatred and wrath is their food; they take no comfort in what they are offered (fol. 145b).[197]

This perception of changes in Arab policy or behaviour is reflected in the outline of *Resh Melle* that John provides at the end of the work. In one part of this outline, he says that he has explained “how [God] called upon us a barbarian kingdom [i.e. the Arabs], and how he punished us through it for a time, how He gave us a period of grace through his patience, how we exalted ourselves and rebelled, how He [again] stirred against us [this] kingdom, and how He caused us to experience with this harsh punishment today.”

1.4 Monasticism in the Church of the East

Monasticism was an extremely important feature of the Church of the East, and it was a monastic context that shaped all of John’s works. This context, which encouraged reflection on

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[196] This text is found in the important BL, OR 9385 manuscript, fols. 230a-234a. See section 2.2.2.1 for a discussion of this manuscript.

[197] Brock, “North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century”, 51-75; reprinted in *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (Variorum Reprints, Aldershot, 1992), ch.2, 60.

God's role in human affairs, would have made it virtually impossible for John to produce a merely secular history. By the seventh century, all of the leaders of the Church (patriarchs, metropolitans and bishops) were chosen from monastic communities. This custom can be traced back to earlier centuries[198] and continued until the fifteenth century. Every monastic community was guided by an Abbot (*resh dayra* or *resh ʿumra*) who acted as their spiritual father and guide. The community of monks were to observe a strict regime of lengthy prayers, vigils, and fasting. At designated times, the entire monastic community would assemble and pray in the monastery church. They would also assemble for the daily communal meal, funeral services, the ceremony of admitting new monks, or in cases of emergency. The monks would spend most of their time in their own cells praying, reading, and resting. Most monasteries would have their own libraries, some of which, at least in the larger institutions, would have contained many manuscripts. These libraries served as places of reading and learning.

1.4.1 Terms and Definitions

The term 'monasticism' is derived from the Greek word *monachos,* 'a monk,' 'a solitary one,' from the verb *monazein,* 'to be alone'. In Syriac, the ascetic who lives in a more isolated setting is designated by the term *iḥidhaya* (ܐܝܚܝܕܝܐ ; 'a solitary', 'a single-one'). The corresponding term *iḥidayutha* (ܐܝܚܝܕܝܘܬܐ) means 'solitariness'. The word *dayra* (ܕܝܪܐ) has various meanings, among which is 'dwelling place', and is often used to refer to the monastery. The related term *dayrayutha* (ܕܝܪܝܘܬܐ) means 'monasticism'. The term *dayraya* (ܕܝܪܝܐ) (and sometimes *rabban* ܪܒܢ) denotes the individual living in a communal monastic setting. Also important are the terms *benay qyama* (ܒܢ̈ܝ ܩܝܡܐ) and *benath qyama* (ܒܢ̈ܬ ܩܝܡܐ) which are translated as ‘sons of the covenant’ and ‘daughters of the covenant’. The term *ʿumra* (ܥܘܡܪܐ) generally means ‘a church’, but it is also sometimes used in Syriac literature to mean ‘a monastery’, and thus can function as a synonym of *dayra*. For example, the rules of Abraham the Great (d. 588 A.D.) refer to “the community of the Monastery (ܕܝܪܐ; *dayra*) of Merda, that is, the Great Monastery (ܥܘܡܪܐ; *ʿumra*) which is on mount Izla.”[199] Throughout his *Book of Chastity,* Ishoʿdnaḥ uses both terms, but favours *ʿumra* over *dayra*.[200] John, however, does not seem to use the terms as synonyms. They occur in only two passages in the phrase *ʿumre w-dayratha* (ܥܘܡܪ̈ܐ ܘܕܝܪ̈ܬܐ ; ‘churches and monasteries’). In the first John describes the influence of Cyril of Alexandria over the churches and monasteries in Egypt (fol. 143b), while in the second he discusses the destruction of churches and monasteries in his own day (fol. 152b).

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[198] The subject of the celibacy of bishops became an issue in the time of Barṣawma, bishop of Nisibis, and was discussed at the "Synod of Aqaq (Acacius)", the Catholicos-Patriarch in 486 A.D. For a further discussion of the issue, see Stephen Gero, *Barṣauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century*, CSCO, (Louvain: Peeters, 1981); and Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia,* vol. I, 194-199.

1.4.2 The Tradition of Mar Awgen[201]

The origins of monasticism are traditionally connected with Egypt in the early decades of the fourth century A.D.[202] In its communal (‘coenobitic’) form, its origins are associated with

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[199] ܟܢܘܫܝܐ ܕܕܝܪܐ ܕܡܪܕܐ. ܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܥܘܡܪܐ ܪܒܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܛܘܪܐ ܕܐܝܙܠܐ .. Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents: Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism.* Stockholm: ETSE, 1960, 152.

[200] In the canons attributed to him, Marutha uses the term *dayra* but not *umra*. *The Canons Ascribed to Maruta of Maipherqat*, ed. and trans. Arthur Vööbus, (Louvain: CORPUS, 1982).

[201] The biography of Awgen is attributed to a certain Michael, who claims to be his disciple. See “The Account of Mar Awgen”, in *AMS*, 7 vols. ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris: 1890-97; repr. Hildesheim: Harrassowitz, 1968), vol. 3, 376-480.

[202] To understand the development of Syriac monasticism, it is essential to study the early development of various forms of asceticism in Syria and Mesopotamia. See Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, 3 vols., (Louvain: Secrétariat de corpusSCO, vol. 1, 1958; vol. 2, 1960; vol. 3, Louvain: Peeters, 1988). Sidney H. Griffith, “Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism”, *Aaceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valanstasis, (Oxford: Oxford Universit Press, 1998), 220-45; Robert Murray, “The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity”, *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, eds, Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews and Robert W. Thomson, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 3-16; Patrik Hagman, The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Pachomius (290-346 A.D.).[203] One tradition in the Church of the East strongly associates the beginning of monasticism in Persian Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylonia) with the person of Abraham the Great, the founder of an important monastery on Mt. Izla (section 1.4.3, below).[204] A different tradition, however, states that it was Mar Awgen who played a leading role in the development of Syriac monasticism and the spread of Christianity in parts of Persia.[205] His biography claims that he came from Egypt with a number of disciples and settled in Nisibis, in upper Mesopotamia. A community soon formed around him.

It is in a work by Dadishoʿ of Qaṭar, a well known ascetic author and one of John's contemporaries, that we find the earliest extant reference to the figure of Awgen.[206] In his work *A Commentary on the Paradise of the Western Fathers*, the name of Awgen is attested eight times.[207] This three-volume commentary is composed as a series of questions and answers. In one section, the monks ask Dadishoʿ: “Why is the blessed Mar Awgen not remembered [in the work] by Palladius, if [indeed] he was contemporary to the holy Anthony and among the three most prominent solitaries of whom Emperor Constantine was proud?”[208] In his reply, Dadishoʿ explains that Mar Awgen’s arrival in Persia occurred before the time of Palladius, during the reign of Emperor Constantine and king Shapur:

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[203] The work entitled *The Paradise of Fathers* was compiled and redacted by Rabban ʿEnanishoʿ of the Monastery of Beth ʿAbe and commissioned by the Catholicos-Patriarch, Giwargis I (660-681 A.D.). This work became a spiritual classic for the monks of the Church of the East. In its Syriac version, see the account "On the blessed Pachomius the Great" in *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, 7 vols. ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris: 1890-97; repr. Hildesheim: Harrassowitz, 1968), vol. 7, 112-17. See also Thomas of Marga, vol. 2, 192-206. Also David Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Chruch of the East,* (London: East & West Publishing, 2011), 130-31. See also J. W. Childers, ʿEnanishoʿ in *GEDSH*, 144.

[204] See Thomas of Marga, bk. 1, ch. 4; also see Ishoʿdnaḥ, *Le Livre de la chasteté,* ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot (Rome: 1896), no. 14. In his *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*, Dadishoʿ of Qaṭar holds Babai the Great and his monastery in great honour. He makes a reference to one of Babai's ascetic works, but does not mention Awgen at all. See DadishoʿQaṭraya, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe*, ed. and trans. René Draguet, (Louvain: Peeters, 1972), *memra* XIII, 5.

[205] The biography of Awgen is attributed to a certain Michael, who claims to be his disciple. See "The Account of Mar Awgen", in *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, (Paris: 1891; repr. Hildeshem: Georg Olms, 1968), vol. 3, 376-480. We also find a brief account of Awgen in the *Book of Chastity* by Ishoʿdnaḥ. See *Le Livre de la chasteté,* no. 1. In his *Commentary on the Paradise of Fathers*, Dadishoʿ states that King Shapur had granted Awgen the freedom to "buil[d] many churches and monasteries [across] the whole land of *Beth Huzaye*" (ܘܒܢܐ ܥܕ̈ܬܐ ܘܕܝܖ̈ܝܬܐ ܣܓܝ̈ܐܬܐ ܒܟܠܗ ܐܪܥܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܗܘܙܝܐ). See B-ACE, fol. 129a.

[206] David Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East*, (London: East & West Publishing, 2011), 174. In his Commentary on Isaiah the Ascetic, Dadishoʿ makes no reference to Awgen. See DadishoʿQaṭraya, *Commentaire du livre d'abba Isaïe*, ed. and trans. René Draguet, (Louvain: Peeters, 1972).

[207] See DadishoʿQaṭraya, *The Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers*, (B-ACE, Ms: fol. 128a, 128b (3 times), 129a (3 times), 155a. In the collection of Syriac manuscripts at the Archbishopric of the Assyrian Church of the East in Baghdad, the manuscript numbered 210 deserves special attention. It is an old Syriac manuscript which is written on parchment. The work is clearly described at its end in this manner: "The expositions of the achievements of the [Desert/Paradise] Fathers being compiled in four-volume book are completed. [That is], three volumes of Palladius and one volume of Jerome... [The work] is composed through questions and reply-answers by Mar Dadishoʿ

> Before the time of Palladius [c. 363-420/430], in the days of Constantine[209] the emperor [306-337], the holy [Awgen] came with ten *aḥḥe* (ܐܚ̈ܐ; brothers, *i.e* solitaries)[210] into the land of Persia during the reign of king Shapur [II, 309-379 A.D.]. He dwelt near Nisibis in caves on Mount Merda, that is, the Monastery of Izla.[211] He was [the first] who began to dwell there, before all [other] solitaries in the land of Persia.[212]

This important passage shows that the figure of Mar Awgen is not controversial for modern scholars alone, but was already debated in the seventh century.

John’s *Resh Melle* makes no reference to Awgen. It must be noted, however, that there is almost nothing about the history of monasticism in this work.[213] In two other works, John provides some interesting information on the subject which shows that he is aware of a historical connection with Egyptian monasticism. In one *memra*,[214] he provides a list of important Greek and Syriac authors who lived as ascetics until the end of their lives. He names Aphrahaṭ, Evagrius Ponticus, John of Apamea, Ammonius, Macarius, and Macarius the Great (fols. 242b-243a). In another *memra*, John describes certain features of monastic dress whose origins he

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Qaṭaraya, the knowledgeable visionary and theologian from the Monastery of *Rab Kennara* (the great harp). See B-ACE, fol. 170a.

[208] B-ACE, Ms: 210, fol. 128b.

[209] In the Account of Mar Awgen, the biographer describes how the news concerning Awgen had reached Constantine. See *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris: 1890-97; repr. Hildesheim: Harrassowitz, 1968), vol. 3, 424-5.

[210] Another source, *The Account of Mar Awgen*, reports that Mar Awgen was accompanied by “seventy solitaries” when they arrived in Nisibis. See *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, 7 vols. ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris: 1890-97; repr. Hildesheim: Harrassowitz, 1968), vol. 3, 387.

[211] There is still a monastery of Mar Awgen on Mt. Izla’ to this day, though no monks are living there.

[212] B-ACE, Ms. 210, fols.128b-129a.

[213] *Resh Melle* is the only complete work of John that has survived. John tells the reader that he composed it through *resh melle* (main points), which explains why many details that a modern reader might expect are missing.

[214] See “A Beneficial Memra of Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye”, MMC, Syr. 448, fols. 116a-125a.

associates with the Egyptian figures of Anthony and Pachomius.[215] These customs must reflect the practice in his own monastery, but they also reflect norms established at the Monastery of Mar Abraham the Great.

1.4.3 The tradition of Mar Abraham the Great

In 571 A.D., Abraham of Kashkar (503-588 A.D.) founded a monastery on Mount Izla.[216] Thomas of Marga says that just as God had chosen Abraham and established him through his faith as "a father of many nations' [Gn 17:5], so too He established the holy Abraham to be "the father of virgins and abstinent men" in the entire land of the East (ܒܟܠܗ ܐܪܥܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ).[217] According to Vööbus, "the East Syrian monastic tradition knows no greater name than that of Abraham. Owing to the role he played in the development of coenobitism, Nestorian Christianity has immortalized him by giving him the epithet *Rabba*, 'the Great'."[218] While Thomas of Marga considers Abraham of Kashkar to be the father of asceticism in Persian Mesopotamia, he must have been aware that earlier ascetic figures had lived in Persia, such as Aphrahaṭ. Indeed, the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahaṭ, which were composed between 337 and 345 A.D., confirm the existence of a well-developed tradition of ascetic practice in Persia which must have been developing for some time before he wrote. Aphrahaṭ wrote as an authoritative figure among the 'solitaries' of his day in Persian, and became known later as 'the Persian sage'.[219] Likewise, he must surely have been aware of certain 4th century figures who flourished within Roman Mesopotamia, such as Abraham, Julian, Jacob of Nisibis, and Ephrem.

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[215] John makes no references to Awgen in his extant works, but praises the figure of Babai the Great in his *memra* entitled "On Faith and concerning all our orthodox Fathers who worked and prospered through it" (*BL*, fols. 236-244b). However, in another *memra* which criticizes the lazy monk, John says the following, ܠܓܡܝܪܘܬܐ ܕܛܟܣܗ ܐܢܛܘܢܝܘܣ: ܣܝܟܗ̇ ܒܕܩܢܐ ܘܒܟܘܣܒܟܐ "He limits the perfection of Anthony's order to beard and head covering" and ܒܝ̈ ܣܟܐ ܕܛܟܣܗ ܦܟܘܡܝܘܣ: ܬܫܒܚܬܗ ܒܡܐ̈ܢܐ ܐܘܟܡܐ "He limits the glorious achievements of the order of Pachomius to black garments." See "A Beneficial Memra of Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye", MMC, Syr. 448, fols. 116a-125a.

[216] Vööbus argues that the founding of the monastery was before June, 571 A.D., when a meeting of the monks with Shemʿon the bishop of Nisibis occurred. Shemʿon was seeking approval of the monastic rules which had been established by Abraham of Kashkar. See, Arthur Vööbus, "The Rules of Abraham of Kashkar" in *Syriac and Arabic Doucuments Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism*, (Stockholm: ETSE, 1960), 150-62.

[217] See Thomas of Marga, vol. 1, 22-4. Accounts from the seventh century highly exalt the Monastery of Abraham the Great, which was founded in 571 A.D. on Mount Izla. These accounts acknowledge its special place among all monasteries of the Church of the East and recognize Abraham as the father of the solitaries in the East, since most of the seventh century monasteries within Persia had been founded by ascetic monks who first lived at the Monastery of Mar Abraham and were the disciples of the latter.

[218] Arthur Vööbus, "The Rules of Abraham of Kashkar" in *Syriac and Arabic Doucuments Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism*, 150.

Therefore, to call Abraham 'the father' of all solitaries in the East is not to imply that he was the first solitary, but signifies his crucial role in the reforming and reshaping of monastic traditions and the creation of many of the distinctive features of monastic life in the Church of the East.[220] It is interesting to note that Abraham of Kashkar, Dadishoʿ [not Dadishoʿ of Qatar, discussed above], Babai, Barʿeta, Gewargis the Martyr, Ishoʿyahb (III, the future Catholicos), all studied at the School of Nisibis, and most of them also joined the Monastery of Abraham. The biography of Barʿeta reports that Khosro, the Sasanian king, asked Sabrishoʿ the Catholicos to gather his bishops and the recognized theologians among the solitaries in order to explain to him what the Church of the East teaches concerning the doctrine of the Trinity.[221] Both Babai and Barʿeta were selected by the Catholicos because of their great learning.[222] This is no wonder since the School of Nisibis is called by Ishoʿyahb III (649-659 A.D.) "the Mother of living [*i.e.* divine] learning."[223] The crucial role of the School of Nisibis and the Monastery of Mar Abraham in preserving and protecting the Christological doctrine of the Church of the East in the seventh century cannot be underestimated. In a letter addressed to Barḥadbshabba, the superior of the Monastery of Abraham, Ishoʿyahb III, urges the entire monastic community to be diligent and vigilant in protecting the orthodox faith and to not hesitate to expel those who err.[224] Ishoʿyahb calls Mount Izla "our Sinai, the holy mount of the Lord, the place of the divine glory – of visions of the Spirit"[225] These expressions by Ishoʿyahb may reflect growing opposition to 'Nestorian' ascetics who may no longer have been welcomed in the Egyptian desert due to their Christological affiliation. The links between Syrian and Egyptian monasticism were strong. Abraham himself had travelled to Egypt and acquainted himself with the forms of ascetic discipline pursued by the monks of Scete and Sinai.[226] During the 7th century, ʿEnan-Ishoʿ, who had also visited Egypt, compiled his *Paradise of the Fathers* (which provides short biographies and compiles various wisdom sayings of the Desert Fathers of Egypt) at the request of patriarch Gewargis I (659-680 A.D.). The 9th century Thomas of Marga, the source of our information about ʿEnan-Ishoʿ, was also a great admirer of the Egyptian fathers. However, these and other authors in the Church of the East, including John bar Penkaye (see section 1.4.2), who honour Egyptian ascetics, focus their attention on figures who lived before the Christological controversies of the 5th century.

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[219] John bar Penkaye, in his *memra* "On Faith and concerning all our orthodox Fathers who worked and prospered through it" (see *BL*, fols. 236-244b), is the earliest East Syrian known author to acknowledge Aphrahaṭ among a list of ascetic authors.
[220] Arthur Vööbus, "The Rules of Abraham of Kashkar" in *Syriac and Arabic Doucuments Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism*, 150.
[221] See Budge, *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar-ʿEdta*, 141.
[222] Ibid., 141.
[223] See Išōʿyahb [Ishoʿyahb] Patriarchae III, *Liber Epistularum*, M, no. 9.

1.5 The Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol

John bar Penkaye is the earliest author who provides vital information regarding his own monastery, the Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol. In an unpublished *memra* from BL 9385, he states that this monastery (which he had joined) was located on Mount Kmol (fol. 194a), to the north-east of Beth Zabdai, west of the river Tigris.[227] According to John, it was founded after the arrival of Rabban ʻUkama, who soon attracted his first two disciples, both named Sabrishoʿ (fol. 194a).

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[224] See Išōʿyahb [Ishoʿyahb] III, M, no. 13.

[225] ܗܢܘ ܕܝܢ ܒܣܝܢܝ ܕܝܠܢ: ܒܛܘܪܗ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܡܪܝܐ: ܒܕܘܟܬ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܐܠܗܝܐ ܕܚܙܘ̈ܢ ܪܘܚܐ. Ibid., M, no. 13.

[226] See Arthur Vööbus, "The Rules of Abraham of Kashkar" in *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, 150.

[227] In his *memra* "On Rabbaan Sabrishoʿ, the founder of the holy convent of Kmol", John refers metaphorically to the 'ship' that carried three solitaries, 'Ukama, Sabrishoʿ and Sabrishoʿ: "Like a ship, [God] guided [them] without harm [a reference to Noah's Ark]; and He wisely directed it to sail towards Mount Kmol; and it came and rested on

Some of this information is confirmed by the *Book of Chastity* (ܢܟ݂ܦܘܬ݂ܐ; *nakhputha*) by Ishoʿdnaḥ. This work provides 140 brief accounts of individuals in the Church of the East who founded monasteries under Persian and Arab rules. It also provides valuable information on those who composed works on asceticism, or who established monastic schools. Ishoʿdnaḥ claims that Rabban ʻUkama arrived from the Monastery of Mar Abraham.[228] The book of *Chastity*[229] also provides further information regarding Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol.[230] It states that he was born in Beth Garmai into a Magian family which had kinship with the Persian kings. The short biography does not state whether his parents had converted to Christianity, but does say that Yoḥannan went to Nisibis and became a disciple of Mar Awgen.[231] He must have lived there for an unknown period since the biography states that he went to settle where the Ark was believed to have come to rest, and lived there and performed miracles and signs. After his death, he was placed in his cave (ܡܥܪܬܗ; *mʿarte*). And after "a long time" (ܢܘܓ݂ܪܐ ܕܙܒ݂ܢܐ; *nuġra dezawna*), the blessed Rabban ʻUkama came from the great monastery of Mar Abraham to the place where Mar Yoḥannan had been laid to rest, and established a monastery nearby.[232] His body was moved from the cave and placed in the new monastery.[233]

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the Qardu mountains around the Ark" (fol. 194a). Mount Kmol is identified by Islamic sources as 'Mount Judi' (See *Qur'an*, sura 11:44.), which is located close to Jazirat ibn Umar, the modern Cizre in Turkey.

[228] See Ishoʿdnaḥ, *Le Livre de la chasteté,* no. 7.

[229] The work was first edited by J.-B. Chabot in 1896, and supplied it with a French translation.

[230] See Ishoʿdnaḥ, *Le Livre de la chasteté,* no. 7.

[231] As noted above, Eliyya of Nisibis states that in the year 309 A.D., Jacob of Nisibis was dwelling with Mar Awgen on Mt. Izla before he was elected as bishop (see *Opus Chronologicum: I*, 98). The *Biography of Mar Awgen* (Paul Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 472-473) states that Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol was a disciple of Mar Awgen and a founder of a church or a monastery. According to this source, Yoḥannan of Kmol must have flourished during the second half of the fourth century.

[232] Ishoʿdnaḥ, *Le Livre de la chasteté,* no. 14.

[233] Ibid., no. 7.

'Ukama's decision to relocate seems to be linked to the difficulties faced by the monastery of Mar Abraham in the early 7th century. In 608, the Persian king, Khosro II (550-628), decreed that the Church of the East could not elect and ordain a new Patriarch during his reign. During the patriarchal vacancy, the well known theologian monk, Babai, was chosen by the hierarchy of the Church of the East to oversee the Church's affairs in North Mesopotamia. This responsibility forced Babai to become more occupied with affairs outside his monastery, work for which he is praised in the sources. As a consequence of his many absences, however, his monastery suffered decline. Divisions appeared and many monks, including 'Ukama, dispersed to other locations.[234] It is with some confidence, therefore, that a fairly precise date for the founding of the monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol may be established. It must have been some time after Babai was appointed as an overseer for North Mesopotamia in 608 and before his death in 628. A date earlier in this period (609-610) is more likely, since it should not have taken many years for resentment against Babai to build.

A manuscript at the British Library (BL) provides new data with respect to the monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol. This new information is very important since it derives directly from John himself. The manuscript includes a metrical *memra* composed by John entitled "On Rabbaan Sabrishoʿ, the founder of the holy convent of Kmol."[235] John includes details about the life of Yoḥannan of Kmol before the monastery named after him was built:

> The place where they [i.e. Ukama and his two disciples] had gathered was difficult to bring peace upon; and along with its difficulty, it was distanced from tranquility. Earlier, a holy man had lived in that place according to [strict] ascetic rules, for he was living a spiritual life and not according to the flesh. He lived with the wild animals, just as John [the Baptist had done]; [thus] it is appropriate that he is named John: "For this particular person was also called Yoḥannan (John), and in mourning [for his sins], he completed his life through good conduct." To this place, Sabrishoʿ had located [himself], along with [another] Sabrishoʿ who shared the discipline and work. The Spirit of Jesus caused to assemble to this place both [Sabrishoʿ and Sabrishoʿ] and 'Ukama, their teacher whom I mentioned above. Through hard work and

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[234] See Thomas of Marga, bk. 1, ch. 14.

[235] ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܥܠ ܪܒܢ ܣܒܪܝܫܘܥ ܗܘ ܐܒܘܗ ܕܥܘܡܪܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܟܡܘܠ (See *BL*, fols. 190a-196b).

> the sweat of their bodies they built it and [brought] tranquility. Behold! Glorious crowns are reserved to them amongst the diligent (fol. 196a).

Thus, according to John, Yoḥannan of Kmol was a holy man who chose the ascetic life and lived as a solitary (ܐܝܚܝܕܝܐ; *iḥidaya*) on the mountain of Kmol, where a monastery named after him was to be found later. He clearly emphasizes that it was "earlier" (ܠܘܩܕܡ; *luqdam*) that Yoḥannan of Kmol had lived on the mountain. These observations of John concerning Yoḥannan of Kmol are confirmed by Ishoʿdnaḥ who speaks of the arrival of Rabban ʻUkama as occurring a "long time" after the death of Yoḥannan of Kmol.[236] Interestingly, John's description of how Yoḥannan of Kmol had conducted his ascetic life is quite similar to the description given by Ephrem (306-373 A.D.) of various mid-4th century hermits; like them, Yoḥannan lived like the wild animals.[237]

In his *memra*, John discusses how Sabrishoʿ and another Sabrishoʿ were both drawn to Rabban ʻUkama and became his disciples. It is quite possible that this ʻUkama is the same person mentioned by Thomas of Marga in connection with the dispersion of the monks of that monastery: "ʻUkama and Sabuḥt went to Beth Zabdai."[238] John speaks highly of Rabban ʻUkama:

> Black (ܐܘܟܡܐ; ʻ*ukama*) by name, his body is pure, and his soul is splendour; the glorious radiances of his excellence [were] like the sun. Because of the truth of his faith and his virtues, he was later chosen to be the bishop of the Arzen region (fol. 194a).

John notes, however, that Ukama abandoned his office as a bishop and returned to his monastery after realizing that "his soul was disturbed by the care of worldly matters, honour and praise" (fol. 194a). A similar incident occurred in the case of the famous Isaac of Nineveh, who was ordained as a bishop in 676 A.D. by Giwargis I, the Catholicos-Partriarch, but soon abandoned his office in favour of the ascetic life.[239]

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[236] See footnote 233 above.

[237] For extreme forms of Syriac asceticism, see Arthur Vööbus, *HASO*, vol. 1, (Louvain: Secrétariat de corpusSCO, 1958); Thedoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R. M. Price, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985).

[238] See Thomas of Marga, bk. 1, ch. 14.

John dedicates his *memra* to Sabrishoʿ (one of the disciples of ʻUkama), who at a young age "abandoned his parents and left behind wealth and possessions, and like a merchant began searching for the kingdom of heaven" (fol. 193b). Ukama and his two disciples eventually settled on Mt. Kmol (fol. 194a). John emphasizes that these three ascetics lived in peace and harmony in the likeness of the apostles, having one soul and one will. Thus they build a holy temple (ܗܝܟܠ ܩܘܕܫܐ; *haykal qudsha*) and chanted with glorious voices like the angels. Their fame spread and soon "many gathered to become disciples of their teaching, in order to learn from them how to aim well towards the goal of [eternal] life" (fol. 194b). John was one of these disciples. Furthermore, John clearly states that before his death, Rabban ʻUkama, the superior of the newly-founded monastery, asked Sabrishoʿ of ʻOshakh[240] to succeed him (fol. 194b).[241]

John shows that under the leadership of Sabrishoʿ, the monastery became more prosperous and famous, attracting many who wished to join the community, or who sought to benefit from his spiritual guidance or to be cured from their diseases:

> The radiance of his excellence flowed like light, and the news regarding his good and victorious labours spread like thunder. [Thus] because of his great reputation, from every direction [people] were gathering,

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[239] Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual Life,* 242.

[240] As John says in his *memra On Rabbaan Sabrishoʿ, the founder of the holy convent of Kmol*, "Sabrishoʿ, who belongs to ʻOshakh villege, which I mentioned earlier, was ordered [by ʻUkama] to be a ruler and superior in his place" ܣܒܪܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܢ ܐܘܫܟ ܩܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܗܕܬ ܒܡܠܬܐ: ܦܩܕܗ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܪܫܐ ܫܠܝܛܗ, ܘܡܕܒܪܢܐ (fol. 194b). In fact, there is no mention of ʻOshakh' earlier in the *memre*. Perhaps this *memra* was originally part of a larger work that included other *memre* on other figures such as Yoḥannan of Kmol and Rabban ʻUkama, in which reference may have been made to this village.

[241] John's *On Rabbaan Sabrishoʿ* clearly declares that Sabrishoʿ was the founder of the Monastery of Kmol. It seems very likely that the site where Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol was buried soon became a well known shrine which was visited by local and distant Christians. Ishoʿdnaḥ says that when the monastery was built on the site, the relics of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol were moved and placed in the monastery. We may accept with confidence John's claim that his superior Rabban Sabrishoʿ was the founder of the Monastery of Kmol. The tradition of calling it 'The Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol' (which Ishoʿdnaḥ follows) reflects the connection of the site and relics with the revered figure of Yoḥannan of Kmol, but it does not mean that the monastery itself was built during the lifetime of Yoḥannan himself.

> and were assisted by faith through his prayers. ... Our Lord polished him like a mirror and placed him before us, so that every person might look and see where his goal was directed" (fol. 195a).

The phrase "before us" clearly indicates that John himself was an eyewitness of these events.

At the end of the *memra*, John recounts the farewell message which was spoken by Sabrishoʿ of 'Oshakh in which he urged his monks to accept the other Sabrishoʿ as his successor:

> "Behold! Submit to Sabrishoʿ who is amongst you, for he is my brother too and together we have laboured since our youth." Like a father, our superior taught us these [things], O beloved ones, and warned us so that we might not neglect [them], lest we be criticized. For these are the canons [of obedience] which our fathers have decreed; we should not disregard them lest we be blamed" (fol. 196a).

While no rules of the Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan have survived,[242] John's work *On Virginity and Holiness*, which consists of four *memre,* and another surviving metrical hymn entitled "A Beneficial *memra* of Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye",[243] provide ample information regarding the ascetic life within his monastery. Like *Resh Melle* itself, and like several other contemporary monastic texts, *On Virginity and Holiness* may have been a commissioned work. There is only one passage in the work where John names a particular individual, a certain ʿAbdishoʿ, whom he describes as "Christ's beloved and our distinguished companion." [244] A few lines later, this same individual is credited with inspiring John to write his *memre*: "On which account, the great fervour of your love has inspired me to compose these [*memre*], that they might be a resource for both of us in the walking of this our path, but also perhaps for many [others as well], if this is according to our Lord's will" (fol. 157a).

Generally speaking, in these four *memre*, John discusses the high honour of monastic discipline. He praises virginity and holiness as "a bright pearl in the crown of Christ" (fol. 163a), and clearly emphasizes that Christ is the prototype of this discipline and that the Gospel initiated this way of spiritual life. In the second of these four *memre*, John lists a number of rules (about forty of them) which must have been associated with his monastery. The inclusion of these rules may suggest that ʿAbdishoʿ had become the fourth superior of the monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol and was seeking John's advice.

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[242] Vööbus, in his *Syriac and Arabic Documents* (ETSE: Stockholm, 1960) edited many monastic rules that belong to the monastic traditions of the Syrian Orthodox Church (Part: I) and the Church of the East (Part: II). The monastic rules of the Church of the East include: I. The So-Called Canons of Maruta. II. The Rules of Abraham of Kashkar. III. The Rules of Dadishoʿ. IV. The Rules of Babai. V. The Rules of Upper Monastery. VI. The Rules of Ishoʿ Barnun. VII. The Rules of Timothy II.

[243] See section 2.2.7 for further discussion of this source.

[244] It is most likely that ʿAbdishoʿ was the fourth superior of the Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol.

1.6 John's View of Monasticism

In *Resh Melle,* John makes only a few references to 'solitaries' (*iḥidaye*; ܐܝܚܝܕܝܐ). The first reference is to the solitaries of the Egyptian desert. He says that Cyril, after the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., caused "the fall of the stars" (fol. 143b), and then explains that these "stars" are the Egyptian solitaries (perhaps a reference to Jesus' saying that "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13:43), or to Paul's saying that "as star differs from star in glory, so it is with the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor 15:41-42). He also states that the early Muslims followed a command from their guide/leader (Muḥammad) concerning how to treat the Christian people and "our order of solitaries" (fols. 144a, 146a).

Some of John's other works[245] contribute more to our understanding of his view of monasticism. This material includes the following:

- *A Beneficial memra of Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye.* (instructions and prohibitions for monks)
- *The Merchant* ('*Taggara*') (short mystical wisdom sayings)
- *The Book on Virginity and Holiness.* (four *memre* of monastic teaching and regulations)
- *On Rabban Saḇrishoʿ, the founder of the monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol.* (A biographical metrical hymn)
- *On Faith and concerning all our Orthodox Fathers who worked and prospered through it.* (A metrical *memra* in praise of ascetics and church fathers up to mid-seven century)

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[245] For a complete list of John's works, see section 2.2.10.

These *memre* allow us to understand John's perspective on monasticism in general and his perspective on his own monastery, which also reflects the monasticism of the Church of the East during the seventh century. We shall now discuss John's perspective on four different aspects of the monastic life, as revealed by these *memre*.

1.6.1 The Origin of Monasticism According to John

What was the origin of Christian monasticism? Does it have biblical roots, or was it a development within the early Church? John acknowledges that certain prototypical features of monasticism are to be found in the Old Testament, but he clearly emphasizes that it was initiated by Jesus himself.

Earlier Syriac authors had already made such comparisons. For example, in his sixth demonstration ("On the Sons of the Covenant"), Aphrahaṭ, writing in 337 A.D., says that those pursuing the solitary life should follow the example of Elijah, by sitting in silence, loving stillness, and awaiting the return of their Lord.[246] In a similar vein, he says that the one who seeks ascetic discipline should live according to the words of Jeremiah: "Blessed is the man who takes up Your yoke in his youth and sits alone in silence since he accepts Your yoke upon himself" (Lam 3:27-28). Aphrahaṭ's references to Elijah and Jeremiah are intended to demonstrate that aspects of the Christian ascetic life were already present in the Old Testament. However, he also says that ascetics imitate their prototype, Jesus. Thus he says that "it is good for whoever carries the yoke of Christ to carry his yoke in purity"[247]And in another often quoted passage, Aphrahaṭ makes the connection with Christ explicit: “[Because] all single-ones (ܝܚܝܕ̈ܝܐ) will be gladdened by the Single-One (ܐܝܚܝܕܝܐ) who is from the bosom of his Father.”[248]

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[246] See Aphrahaṭ, "Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes", in *Patrologia Syriaca*, ed. and trans. into Latin Ioannes Parisot, (Paris: 1894; repr. Turnhout, Belgium: Editions Brepols, 1980), bk. 6, 253-4.

[247] Ibid., bk. 6, 261.

Likewise, the *Canons* which are attributed to Marutha of Maipharqaṭ claim that features of monasticism were already found in prophets such as Elijah, Elisha and Hosea.[249] But they also include John the Baptist and James the Lord’s brother from the era of the New Testament as examples to be followed.[250] John, too, draws certain parallels between the founders of his monastery and the prophets. Thus, concerning ʿUkama and his two companions (both named Sabrishoʿ) he says, “Like Elijah and John [the Baptist], they departed into the wilderness, and like [Moses] the son of Amram they saw God on the peak of the mountain” (fol. 193a).

John spends much more time, however, developing the idea that Jesus himself was the prototype for the ascetic life an idea which is also expressed by his fellow ascetic author, Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya.[251] For example, he says that Jesus had instructed his disciples on how to engage in combat with the Slanderer (i.e. Satan) while arming themselves with the sharp arrows of the words of the Spirit (fol. 190b).[252] He notes that Jesus went into the wilderness, and as a warrior conquered his adversary: "[Christ] the King made his soldiers [i.e. disciples] excel in these beatitudes, and commanded them to hate the world and its desires. Like a warrior, He himself walked before them on the path, and the Rebellious One was disturbed and terrified by His words" (fol. 191b). In the following passage, John again interprets a saying of Jesus in a monastic way:

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[248] Ibid., bk. 6, 269.
[249] ʿAbdishoʿ states that the monastic discipline (ܬܓܡܐ ܕܕܝܪ̈ܝܐ) “was first known in the Old Testament by ‘children of the prophets’ (ܒܢܝ̈ ܢܒܝ̈ܐ) such as Elijah, Elisha and the rest (see 2Kings 9:1). But when our Saviour Christ came to the world, His first disciples and the later apostles were from this group. Christ also lived in the same way, and from this time they became known *napqe* (ܢܦ̈ܩܐ) because they abandoned the world (ܕܢܦܩܘ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ).” ʿAbdishoʿ paraphrases Paul to refer to this group: “Of such [people] the world was not worthy... [T]hey were destitute, persecuted, and tormented, not by force, but they accepted such things against them willingly. They wandered in deserts. They abandoned peace and dwelled in caves and holes. Instead of [normal] dress, they dressed in the skins [of sheep and goats]” (see Heb 11:37-38). See ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, “On Rites and Canons of the Solitaries”, in *The Concise Collection of Synodical Canons*, bk. 7.
[250] See “On History of Monasticism”, *The Canons Ascribed to Maruta of Maipherqaṭ,* ed. and trans. Arthur Vööbus, (Louvain: Peeters, 1982), ch. 3.
[251] “...[F]or they sold their possessions and gave to the poor, carried their cross according to the command of our Lord, and followed after him. They went out from the world while bearing his dishonour, which is the model for our dress and tonsure, and typologically [refere] to the scarlet cloak and crown of thorns of our Lord Jesus Christ, [who is] our prototype” (ܟܕ ܓܝܪ ܙܒܢܘ ܩܢܝܢܗܘܢ: ܘܝܗܒܘ ܠܡܣܟܢ̈ܐ. ܘܫܩܠܘ ܙܩܝܦܗܘܢ ܐܝܟ ܦܘܩܕܢܗ ܕܡܪܢ: ܘܐܙܠܘ ܒܬܪܗ. ܘܢܦܩܘ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܟܕ ܫܩܝܠܝܢ ܨܥܪܗ: ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܐܣܟܡܐ ܕܠܒܘܫܢ ܘܣܘܦܪܐ ܕܪܫܢ: ܠܦܘܩܝܐ ܕܙܚܘܪܝܬܐ ܘܟܠܝܠܐ ܕܟܘ̈ܒܐ ܕܡܪܢ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܛܘܦܣܢ.). See Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya, *Commentary on the Paradise of Fathers*, B-ACE, Ms: 210, fols, 41a-b.

> He personally walked the path and commanded them, "Whoever loves me, let him take up his cross and follow me."[253] [In other words,] 'The one who loves me will manifest the sign of his love in this [way]: when he accepts suffering on my behalf without wavering. Let the brother who wishes to follow me and become my disciple [first] hate his relatives and the household of his parents and then come [and follow me].' For He was teaching us about the perfection which is to come, when the form of this world passes away, as it is written, "Neither parents nor children exist there, nor close [relatives], nor distant [relatives], nor guardians" (fol. 191a).

A little later in the same work, he invokes the authority of Paul:

> Together with [that] trumpet, Paul, the chosen one, we have no cities[254] or parents here [on earth]. We have no cities or parents here [on earth], for behold, our city is in heaven, and our Father and our Mother[255] (fol. 192b).

In this *memra* John often appeals to Jesus' teaching and often makes references to Paul's letters. There can be no question that, in John's mind, Christian asceticism is founded on the teaching of

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[252] This is a reference to Paul's saying: "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17).

[253] See Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; and Lk 9:23.

[254] See Heb 13:14; 12:22; Php 3:20.

[255] John's emphasis on "our Father who is in heaven" is certainly associated with the Lord's Prayer (see Mt 6:9; Lk 11:2). His emphasis on "our Mother who is in heaven", however, is a clear reference to the Holy Spirit who generates spiritually through Baptism. The feminine expression concerning the Holy Spirit is a well known phenomenon in early Syriac literature. Its roots are biblical, as we read in the angel's declaration to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come..." (ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܬܐܬܐ). The Syriac Peshiṭṭa (Lk 1:35) uses the verb (*tete*; ܬܐܬܐ), which is imperfect feminine singular, and literally means "She will come."

Jesus and Paul.[256] This idea is also reflected in the title of a lost work of Tatian (120-185 A.D.): “On perfection according to the Saviour.”[257]

1.6.2 Virginity and Holiness

One of John’s works is entitled *On Virginity and Holiness*,[258] which consists of four *memre* (BL fols. 155b-190a). The work immediately follows *Resh Melle* (fols. 3b-155b). The short biography which was published by A. Scher, however, claims that John wrote “five *penqyan* [books] on the discipline of holiness.”[259] If this statement is a reference to John’s work *On Virginity and Holiness*, then the latter must have had another *memra* which is now lost. It is possible that John’s “A Beneficial *memra* of Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye” may fit this gap since its literary genre is similar, though it must be pointed out that it was composed in metric verse rather than in prose.

In this work, John refers to a saying of Christ about how a married man or woman is anxious to please his or her spouse: “Thus our Lord said, ‘Whoever wishes to be my disciple, let him abandon every [...][260] of the world and his life too”[261] (fol. 173b). A parallel to John can be seen in Dadishoʿ of Qaṭar, one of John’s contemporaries, who was asked by some of his fellow monks, “Through which sayings of Paul did Amun [the Egyptian solitary] counsel his betrothed (ܠܟܠܬܐ)”? Dadishoʿ replies that Amun had used Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, and he explains these verses in the same way as John.[262]

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[256] The followers of Christ were called ‘Christians’ since they believed in him and followed his teaching (Acts 11:26). Jesus Christ is the model and prototype for all Christians to follow, and he was proclaimed by the angel as “the Saviour Christ and the Lord” (Lk 2:11). He describes himself as “the good Shepherd” (Jn 10:11). In their accounts of the Transfiguration, all three synoptic gospels include a direct command from God to listen to His Son (Mt 17:5, Mk 9:7; Lk 9:35).

[257] W. L. Petersen, “Tatian”, *GEDSH*, 396-7.

[258] The eighteenth demonstration of Aphrahaṭ is entitled, “Against the Jews: Concerning Virginity and Holiness.” Might John have had this demonstration in mind? John’s reference to Aphrahaṭ (section 1.4.2) strongly suggests that he was familiar with his work.

[259] ܘܥܠ ܕܘܒܪ̈ܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܣܡ ܚܡܫܐ ܦܢ̈ܩܝܢ ‘He composed five *penqyān* (treatises or *memrē*), *On the Discipline of Holiness*’. See Scher, “Notice”, 163.

[260] There is a lacuna in the text at this point.

[261] See Luke 14:26. Paul makes a similar point: “There is a difference between a woman and unmarried virgin who is anxious about the affairs of her Lord, so that she may be holy in her body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband” (1 Cor 7:34). He emphasizes, however, that the unmarried state is not commanded by God, but must be chosen (1 Cor 7:6).

John argues that virginity is a gift from God: “Through Grace, virginity was given to the race of mankind by God” (fol. 163a). He also tries to distinguish between virginity and holiness by saying that “virginity is the weaning of the body from sexual union, while holiness is the weaning of the soul from all the evil passions of sin” (fol. 163a). On the other hand, John clearly argues that each one fulfills and perfects the other: “Let us love virginity and holiness as a mother of all good benefits and the nourisher of excellent things. The virginity of the body does not become pure without the holiness of the soul, nor is the holiness of the soul believed to be perfect without the virginity or purity of the body” (fol. 163a). However, John highly praises virginity as a unique vocation to be followed: “Virginity is a bright pearl which our Lord placed in the darkened depths of this world so it might enlighten mankind with the hope that is kept for them in the world to come. Virginity is an emerald in the Crown of the Heavenly King” (fol. 170a).

1.6.3 Bride and Bridegroom

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul introduces an analogy to describe the bond of marriage. He says that the love and obedience between a husband and wife should be modeled after that which exists between Christ, the bridegroom, and His bride, the Church (see Eph 5:21-33). For John, Paul’s analogy applies also to the monastic context, even though monks and nuns are, by definition, unmarried. Thus he refers to the human soul (ܢܦܫܐ ; *napsha*; a feminine term in Syriac) of virgins (male or female) as a bride, with Christ as her bridegroom:

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[262] Here we have consulted a digital copy of the work, Dadishoʿ of Qaṭar, *Commentary on the Paradise*, (Baghdad: Metropolitan Library of the Assyrian Church of the East), (fols. 162b-163a).

> Now with the blessed David [i.e. the psalmist] it is appropriate for me to say to you, O soul who wishes to follow our Lord through virginity in this manner: “Listen to me, my daughter, see, and incline your ear. Forget your people and your father’s house, so that Christ the King will desire the beauty of your soul” (a paraphrase of Ps 45:10-11a). This saying applies to the soul who at once decided in her mind to preserve virginity and holiness for Christ. Just as a virgin does not forget the memory of her [bridegroom], or the bride her embellishment, it is appropriate for you, O soul, that the memory of our Lord should not be forgotten in your heart. As we have said above, this can be accomplished in you when you abandon all the affairs of the house of your parents and care only about this: how to embellish your soul and your body for Christ the King, with whom you have entered into *qyama* (ܩܝܡܐ ; a covenant), so that you might be His bride through your holiness (fols. 173a-b).[263]

The famous biblical saying that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife”[264] is also interpreted by John within a monastic context: “It is also proper for you to know whom you have abandoned and whom you are seeking. For you have abandoned this world and its fellowship and have established a covenant to keep chastity towards Christ our Lord” (fol. 174a). John sees an ideal relationship between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the soul of virgins (male and female). Thus, he says, “For there is nothing that virginity asks our Lord without granting... [Christ] reveals and shows all his hidden things to her clearly. [He] also grants those [which belongs to] Him, and informs all His pleasures to her.”[265] John clearly affirms that salvation has been offered to all mankind, but praises the state of virginity and holiness as a better way: “I am not saying that all humans do not belong to our Lord, since all humans are truly the servants of God. [I claim], however, that the soul that keeps virginity and holiness is the daughter of God, and the bride of His Son Jesus” (fol. 164a).

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[263] For a discussion of the use of the images of bride and bridegroom in early Syriac sources, see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975; 2nd ed. New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2004).

[264] Gen 2:24; Mt 19:5; Mk 10:7; Eph 5:31.

[265] BL, fol. 163b.

1.6.4 The term 'Covenant' (ܩܝܡܐ ; *Qyama*)

Ascetic groups known as 'Sons of the Covenant' and 'Daughters of the Covenant' had flourished across the Syriac Christian world since at least the fourth century, and continued in some forms even after John's lifetime, as will be discussed below.[266]

Arthur Vööbus explains that the term *qyama* (ܩܝܡܐ) can be connected to Jesus' *qyamta* (ܩܝܡܬܐ ; resurrection; the Syriac root means "to rise up" or "to stand") or with ascetic vows. He concludes that *benai qeiama* and the *benat qyama* are those who take an ascetic vow and are members of the body of the *qyama*.[267]

These ascetics were already an established presence in the early 4th century in the time of Aphrahaṭ, who provides valuable information concerning the early development of this order. Writing as a 'son of the covenant' himself, he offers spiritual direction and instructions on proper conduct and how to follow Christ, who is seen by all ascetics as the model for their way of life. In one of his hymns, Narsai (399-503 A.D.) declares, "[Christ] delivered a new covenant (ܕܝܬܩܐ) to those that receive his teaching; and sealed it with his own blood, lest his promises (ܫܘܘܕܝܘ̈ܗܝ) be falsified."[268] In the Eucharistic prayers of the Apostles Mar Addai and Mar Mari, the term *qyaman* (ܩܝܡܢ) is attested in the final benediction prayer of the liturgy, but does not here denote ascetics in particular.[269] The ascetic mode of life of the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant was still common in the era of Jacob of Sarug (ca. 500 A.D.). In a *memra* entitled “On a daughter of covenant, chaste and virgin, who departs this world”, he says of this woman that “a covenant (ܩܝܡܐ) she made to the Single-One (ܐܝܚܝܕܝܐ) who died for her sake, [that] she would have no relationship with another person except Him.”[270] The term *qyama* also appears in the biography of Rabban Bar-ʿEdta, which states that his sister had joined one of the female monasteries that surrounded the city of Nisibis: “She entered into the way (ܐܣܟܝܡ) of the covenant, with Christ the heavenly bridegroom.”[271]

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[266] The Synod of Ishoʿyahb in 585 A.D. declares in its eighth canon, "Thus, the synod commands and binds by the Word of God that all who are wearing the dress (ܐܣܟܡܐ) of the covenant (ܩܝܡܐ), and who desire to live *nzira'ith* (ܢܙܝܪܐܝܬ ; abstinently) and in poverty (ܡܣܟܢܐܝܬ), let be chosen for them known dwelling places (ܥܘܡܪ̈ܐ ܝܕ̈ܝܥܐ) in their parents' house, or with the clergy (ܩܠܪ̈ܝܩܐ) in the church, or with monks (ܕܝܪ̈ܝܐ) in the monastery (ܕܝܪܐ)." See *SO,* Syr. 144-45.

[267] Vööbus, *HASO*, I, 97-103. See Robert Murray, "The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity", *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, 3-16;

[268] Narsai uses the term *diateqe* (ܕܝܬܩܐ) to refer to the covenants that were made between God and the People of Israel. The mediators of these covenants, Moses (Ex 24:1-8) and Joshua (Jos 24:19-28), sealed them with the blood of animals. For Narsai, God gave the New Covenant through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17), who sealed it through his own blood (Heb 12:24). See *Ḥudra,*vols. I-III, 105-106. Also see, *East Syrian Daily Offices*, trans. Arthur John Maclean, (London: 1894; repr. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003), 168-169.

An important piece of information on female ascetics (i.e. the Daughters of the Covenant) is found in the Canons of the Synod of George, which was held in 676 A.D., only eleven years before John wrote *Resh Melle*.[272] The Synod outlines their way of life, appearance, dress, and the duties and functions which were assigned to them during the seventh century. The canon also emphasizes that these women should be grouped into one or two monastic communities at locations within a city, which implies that up to this time they were organized in many small groups within a city but not in monasteries.

In *Resh Melle*, John makes infrequent use of the term *qyama* (covenant; ܩܝܡܐ), which of course has deep roots in the Old Testament. He demonstrates that “[the Israelites] did not remember [God’s] holy *testaments* (*diateqaw*; ܕܝܬܩ̈ܘܗܝ), the laws and *covenants* (*qyame*; ܩܝܡ̈ܐ) that He gave them through Moses His servant” (fol. 16a). In another passage he refers to “the

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[269] The relevant text reads as follows: “...[L]et Him bless our congregation, protect *our covenant* (ܩܝܡܢ), and make our people shine as they came and were pleased by the power of the Sacraments...” See *The Liturgy of the Church of the East*, ed. Joseph Qelayta, (Mosul: The Assyrian Press, 1928), 56.

[270] See (Jacob of Sarug), *Homiliæ selecte Mar-Jacobi sarugensis*, vol. 5, ed. Paul Bedjan, (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1910), H-191, 826.

[271] The *Account of Rabban Bar ʿEdta* was originaly written by his disciple Yoḥannan according to Thomas of Marga. His extent metric account however was written much later by Abraham Zabaya and in brief, since the latter testifies that the original account was too long to be read on the day of Bar ʿEdta’s commemoration, 114-15.

[272] On the duties of *bnath qyama,* see canon 9 of “Synod of George” (676), *SO*, Syr. 217-18.

promise (*mulkana*; ܡܘܠܟܢܐ) that God made to [Abraham] and the *covenant* (ܩܝܡܐ) that He established with him" (fol. 49b). John's reference is to the covenants which were established by God with Noah (Gen 9:9-17), Abraham (Gen 15:17-21), and Moses (Ex 34:10-32). These covenants are not between equals but between God and man.

In his work *On Virginity and Holiness*, John says that he is going to introduce "excellent accounts that are relevant for chaste covenant of male and female virgins" (fol. 157b). He emphasizes the requirements placed upon the person who wishes to be faithful to the covenant that he or she had entered:

> If we guard our [body] without stain it becomes a member of [the body] of our Lord. [Thus] our Lord will enact through it his own affairs, as [He does] through the rest of his members. But if we separate [our body] from the covenant of virginity and holiness, it deserves a judgement of death (fol. 163b).

John says that nothing should separate the soul from its love for Christ the bridegroom:

> Even [when] death itself is pressing, it cannot turn me back so that I would renounce the covenant and the conditions which I established with the heavenly bridegroom, to keep the truth of my virginity for Him (fol. 183a).[273]

John emphasizes that the soul that enters a covenant with Christ has freely surrendered herself to her beloved bridegroom:

> Likewise, the soul that loves God and has established a covenant to keep [her] virginity for our Lord, from this point on, the soul has no authority over her body except Christ who betrothed her through His living blood. Thus, O soul, continue to sanctify your body for the One who sanctified you through the sprinkling of his blood (fol. 183b).

More than a century later, a letter of Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy (780-823 A.D) addressed to Sargis the metropolitan bishop of Elam clearly testifies that "Daughters of Covenant" were still active and lived in their monasteries by ca. 800 A.D.:

> This is the reason for our present discussion. There is a monastery (ܕܝܪܐ) in the city of Beth Lapaṭ (ܒܝܠܦܛ) which is called Dbnog (ܕܒܢܘܓ). In it, there is a certain daughter of the covenant (ܒܪܬ ܩܝܡܐ) who is called Hannah. She committed an offense and went out from her monastery (ܕܝܪܗ). Her brothers came and persuaded me to write to your kindness, that you may summon the superior of the monastery (ܪܝܫܬ ܕܝܪܐ) and that daughter of the covenant (ܒܪܬ ܩܝܡܐ) and reconcile them with one another, so that the

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[273] For a similar theme, see Rom 8:39.

> sister (ܚܬܐ) might turn and come back to her monastery. O brother, investigate and take care of this [matter] and make peace between them so that sister (ܚܬܐ) Hannah might re-enter her cell (ܩܠܝܬܗ). Write and inform me concerning what you will do on this matter.[274]

Thus, it is clear that female virgins who lived in a monastery continued to be addressed as "Daughters of the Covenant."

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[274] See "[Timothy's letter] to Sargis of Elam," *Timothei Patriarchae I: Epistulae*, no. 7.

Chapter 2

Yoḥannan (John) bar Penkaye: A Biographical Sketch

2.1 Life

John bar Penkaye is a well-known theologian-monk of the Church of the East who flourished during the seventh century A.D. Our information about his personal life derives from his work, *Resh Melle*, a short biography edited by Addai Scher,[275] and a set of unedited *memre* contained in a manuscript at the British Library.[276] Despite the fact that he was a significant author, neither Thomas of Marga (9th century), in his monastic history commonly known as the *Book of Governors*, nor Ishoʿdnaḥ of Baṣrah (9th century) in his *Book of Chastity*, provides any reference to him.[277]

In *Resh Melle*, John informs us that his work was a response to a request made to him by Sabrishoʿ, the abbot of his monastery – his name appears nine times in folios 30b; 33b; 95a; 96a; 109b; 114a; 121b; 148a; 150a. This and other works of John show that he was multi-talented; he was a historian, poet, compiler, theologian, liturgist, ascetic, and an interpreter of the Scriptures. Tradition attributes to John a hymn included in the *Ḥudra,* the main liturgical and prayer book of the Church of the East.[278] The mystical author Joseph Ḥazzaya (8th century) wrote a commentary on the *Book of Taggara,*[279] and three major authors in the Church of the East quote his works: Ishoʿdad of Merv (9th century) in his *Commentary of the Old Testament*,[280] ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis (d. 1318 A.D.) in his *Book of the Pearl,*[281] and Isḥaq Shbadnaya (15th century) in his *A Hymn on the Divine Dispensation from the Beginning until Eternity*.[282] George of Arbela (10th century), in his *Exposition of the Ecclesiastical Services*, may have been drawing on *Resh Melle.*[283] In his *Ethikon*, the Syrian Orthodox scholar Bar Hebraeus mentions "[a letter] of John bar Penkaye, an eastern solitary, to one of his fellow solitaries."[284]

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[275] See Scher, "Notice", 161-178.

[276] For a discussion of this manuscript, see section 2.2.2.1.

[277] Both Thomas of Marga and Ishoʿdnaḥ (see bibliography) provide valuable information in their works about the early life of monasticism in the Church of the East. Thomas' work, *The Book of Governors*, mainly concerns the Monastery of Beth-ʿAbe and its monks. In the *Book of Chastity* however, Ishoʿdnaḥ describes many monasteries, their founders, and famous authors who flourished during the reigns of the Persians and the Arabs.

[278] This hymn is incorporated into the *Ḥudra* as part of the Feast of Nativity, but with no attribution of authorship. See, *Ḥudra*, vol. I, 562-65. However, the same hymn "is said (ܡܬܐܡܪܐ) to have been composed by John bar Penkaye" (see section 2.2.8) in the manuscript tradition used by Joseph Qelayta in his edition, ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, *The Book of Pearl: On the Truth of Christianity, and a Collection of Beneficial Memre* (Mosul: Assyrian Press, 1924), 108-111. Also see Alber Aboona, *Aramaic [Syriac] Literature,* 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Mashreq, 1996), 279-82.

In the colophon of most of the manuscript copies of the *Resh Melle*, John is given the descriptor 'penkaya' in reference to his native village Penek (ܦܢܟ; fol. 150b). Likewise, in the scribal introductions at the beginning of all manuscripts of the *Resh Melle*, the author is identified as Yoḥannan bar Penkaye. The village is also mentioned in the hagiography of Mar Shalliṭa (4th-5th centuries), who is said to be a disciple of Mar Awgen. In this account, Shalliṭa flees from the church at Izla Mountain (near Nisibis) to the land of Beth-Zabdai, and, crossing the Tigris river about one mile south of the village of Penek, he ascends the Shba Mountain.[285]

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[279] This attribution is based on the *Catalogue* of ʿAbdishoʿ, *Catalogue, BO*, III/1, 100-103. According to Ishoʿdnaḥ (*Le Livre de la chasteté,* no. 125), "[Joseph Ḥazzaya] received [his] baptism at the Monastery of Yoḥannan of Kmol (ܘܩܒܠ ܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ ܒܥܘܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝ، ܝܘܚܢܢ ܕܟܡܘܠ)... [A]fterwards, the faithful approached him, and made him Abbot of the Monastery of Mar Bassima (ܗܝܕܝܢ ܐܬܘ ܡܗܝܡ̈ܢܐ ܠܘܬܗ: ܘܥܒܕܘܗܝ، ܪܫ ܥܘܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝ، ܒܣܝܡܐ)." John's early life in these two monasteries strengthens the possibility that the work entitled *The Merchant* upon which Joseph wrote a commentary is identical to the work of the same name which is attributed to John. We may safely assume that this work was accessible to (Abbot) Joseph at his monastery's library.

[280] A discussion of Ishoʿdad's use of John may be found in section 2.3.3.

[281] See section 2.3.2 for this quotation by ʿAbdishoʿ.

[282] See section 2.3.2 regarding Isḥaq Shbadnaya's use of John.

[283] George of Arbela, *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae*, CSCO SS 141-151 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1911). George's statement that the patriarchal see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon depended at the beginning on the patriarchal see of Antioch is certainly based on an earlier source, possibly *Resh Melle* itself, where John bar Penkaye makes a similar statement (fol. 137a).

[284] Gregorius Bar-Hebræus, *Bibliotheca orientalis clementino-vaticana*, ed. and trans. J. S. Assemani, (Rome: 1719-28 [Repe. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000]), vol. II/2, 306. (ܕܝܘܚܢܢ ܒܪ ܦܢܟܝܐ ܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܡܕܢܚܝܐ ܠܘܬ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܝܚܝ̈ܕܝܐ ܚܒܪ̈ܘܗܝ، [ܐܓܪܬܐ]).

[285] See *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace* [hereafter *AMS*] 7 vols. Ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: 1890-97; repr. Hildesheim: Harrassowitz, 1968), vol. I, 451-52.

The account of Ishoʾdnaḥ also relates that Mar Shalliṭa came and dwelt for some time in Penek, "a village in Beth-Zabdai, and departed at the age of ninety two."[286] These sources confirm the location of Penek given by Strabo, who situates *Pinaka* (surely the Penek of our sources) "near the Tigris."[287]

John's date of birth is unknown. He may have become a monk at an early age, and if so, he would have been guided and supervised by an older monk. In the second *memra* of his work entitled *On Virginity and Holiness*, he states, "a young person fifteen years old or under should not be accepted at the convent without a mentor (*meṣʿaya*) who becomes his guardian and cares for him; otherwise he will become an obstacle for all the brothers" (fol. 166b). The short biography edited by Scher claims that John became a monk at the monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol, when Mar Sabrishoʿ was the head of the monastery.[288] As mentioned above (see section 1.5), Sabrishoʿ founded a convent on the mountain of Qardu (where Noah's Ark is said to have rested, and located in the region of Corduene) and when Rabban 'Ukama of the great monastery of Abraham arrived there, he established a glorious monastery in the memory of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol, whose relics were placed therein.[289] According to the afore-mentioned biography, after John joined this monastery, his body was stricken with a minor case of leprosy, but he was eventually healed and cleansed of his disease. The abbot Sabrishoʿ used to anoint him with the oil that was placed over the burial place of Mar Yoḥannan and Mar 'Ukama, the builder of the monastery. He then began his coenobitic labour with “delight and conscious will.” He chose to live in silence throughout the week, and once a week he would go to the main monastic church to participate in the Eucharistic Liturgy. The biography recalls several literary works composed by John, and states that he had also lived in the monastery of Argoġ and grew up in the monastery of Yoḥannan of Dalyatha. It concludes that John died at the age of seventy-three and that his body was placed in the great monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol.[290]

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[286] Ishoʿdnaḥ, *Le Livre de la chasteté,* no. 5.
[287] *The Geography of Strabo*, ed. and trans. Horace Leonard Jones (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1961), 7.16.24. The location of the ancient site of Phenek is about forty kilometres north-west of modern day Cizre, just to the east of the Tigris River; see Andrew Palmer, *Monks and Mason on the Tigris Frontier*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), figure 1 (map), xxi.
[288] Scher, "Notice", 162.
[289] Ishoʿdnaḥ, *Le Livre de la chasteté*, no. 7. About the location of the monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol, Fiey informs us that the extensive ruins of this monastery, today referred to as 'Dera Kmuli', are located on the southwest slope of Mt Judi, near the village of Dadar, about twenty kilometres east of Cizre. See Jean-Maurice Fiey, *Nisibe métropole syriaque orientale*, CSCO 388 Subsidia 54 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1977), 199.

John bar Penkaye is often confused with John of Dalyatha, a prominent ascetic author of the Church of the East, an association perpetuated by the afore-mentioned biography. To make matters worse, in their respective manuscript traditions, both authors are sometimes given the same title ‘Sawa’ (lit. ‘elder’),[291] so that later Syriac traditions sometimes confuse the two authors.[292] Vööbus demonstrates that ʿAbdishoʿ, very familiar with ancient Syriac literary works, clearly differentiated between the two Johns, attributing to each author his own list of works.[293]

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[290] Scher, “Notice”, 164.

[291] The term *sawa* (ܣܒܐ) has a special meaning in the monastic setting which is not fully captured in the English term ‘elder.’ The title would only be given to senior monks who had lived several decades or more in a monastery and who were advanced in discipline and wisdom. Advanced age, in itself, was not enough to secure this distinction. See the descriptions given in “The Account of Mar Awgen” in *AMS*, vol. III, 367-480. Moreover, Yoḥannan Bar Kaldon (the 10th century biographer of Joseph Busnaya), states that when he joined the monastery, it had 270 monks amongst which there were thirty distinguished *sawe* (elders) with spiritual excellencies (MMC, Syr. 66, fols. 162b-163a).

[292] This confusion seems to be caused by West-Syrian tradition, in which East-Syrian ascetic works were sometimes attributed to an anonymous “Sawa” and thus made more acceptable. A good example of this tendency is found in “The Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers” by Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya. The entire work is structured around several hundred questions posed by monks with corresponding answers provided by Dadishoʿ, who is explicitly named as the teacher (according to an old parchment manuscript at the Archbishopric Library of the Assyrian Church of the East in Baghdad, no. 210). However, the same work in a 13th-century West-Syrian manuscript (British Library Add. MS 17264) has all the answers given not by Dadishoʿ but by many different authorities, introduced by various terms, such as ‘teacher’ (ܡܠܦܢܐ), or ‘elder’ (ܣܒܐ), or ‘solitary’ (ܐܝܚܝܕܝܐ). At one point (fol. 44a), the response is attributed to the famous bishop Philoxenos (d. 523). In East-Syrian tradition, ʿAbdishoʿ (d. 1318) in his *Catalogue*, the well-known Sargis (Sergios) of Reshʿayna (d. 536), 87, and Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), 229, are counted among East-Syrian authors while the first author is debated the second one certainly belongs to West-Syrian tradition.

[293] Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* [hereafter *HASO*], CSCO 500 Subsidia 81 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1988), vol. III, 334. In his *Catalogue,* ʿAbdishoʿ demonstrates that “Yoḥannan [John] of Dalyatha also composed two books; and mournful letters on monastic rule.” ʿAbdishoʿ also provides an important list of John’s works, as discussed below (see section 2.2.3).

Vööbus concluded that “the position taken by Baumstark, Chabot, and Graf, that Sawa was actually Yoḥannan of Dalyatha is proven to be true.”[294]

Certain passages in Book XV of *Resh Melle* confirm that John was still alive close to the end of the seventh century. Since John describes certain consequences of the battle that occurred between two Arab factions on the river Ḥazir in northern Mesopotamia in A.D. 686 (A.H. 67),[295] and since he gives no further specific historical information, he must have composed *Resh Melle* soon after.[296] In describing these historical events, John was a careful observer of what was unfolding around him. It is important to note that the *Resh Melle* includes no serious criticism of the Arabs. In a little known *memra* attributed to him, however, his tone turns very negative with respect to the Arabs. This is a metrical (seven-syllable) poem entitled *ʿal baʿutha* “On Rogation” (fols. 230a-234a), and in it he speaks about *bnai Hagar* (ܒܢ̈ܝ ܗܓܪ; *the children of Hagar*), a clear reference to the Arabs. Invoking Jeremiah, John laments the suffering of his Christian people and stresses the magnitude of the oppression that he was witnessing: “Arise, O Jeremiah, and cause our people to weep like your people, and compose for [our people] lamentations [even] greater than those [that you composed before]” (ܩܘܡ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܒܟܝܗܝ ܠܥܡܢ ܒܕܡܘܬ ܥܡܟ: ܘܪܒܝ ܥܠܘܗܝ ܡܠ ܐܘ̈ܠܝܬܐ ܛܒ ܡܢ ܗܢܘܢ) (fol. 227b). As John describes the situation, this oppression was due to many things: the looting and destruction of cities and villages and fields; the massacre of elders, infants and youth; the taking of captives; and death by hunger among those fleeing to hide in the mountains. This overall negative description seems more developed than what we read at the end of Book XV, which suggests that the author lived for some time after the composition of the

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[294] Vööbus, *HASO*, Part III, 334.

[295] Kennedy also locates this battle at river Khazir, near Mosul in Muḥarram 67/August 686. See Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 94.

[296] See section 3.4 for a discussion of the date of composition of *Resh Melle.*

Resh Melle (which was around the year A.D. 687).[297] Many modern scholars assume that, given the crisis that he was witnessing, John must have died soon after writing the *Resh Melle.* It must be pointed out, however, that, since no other extant works by John can be assigned a clear date, his death in the late 680s remains a matter of speculation. One more piece of evidence deserves consideration. In chapter 3, we discuss a number of *memre* attributed to John that have not yet been edited. Four of these *memre* are grouped together under the title *The Book on Virginity and Holiness* mentioned above (see section 1.5). There are strong indications that this work was commissioned by a certain ʿAbdishoʿ, who was a member of John's monastic community:

> [T]he great fervour of your love has inspired me to compose these [*memre*], that they might be a resource for both of us in the walking of this our path, but also perhaps for many [others as well], if this is according to our Lord's will (fol. 157a).

Generally speaking, in these four *memre*, John discusses the high honour of the monastic order. He praises virginity and holiness as "a bright pearl in the crown of Christ" (fol. 163a), and clearly emphasizes that Christ is the model of this discipline and that the Gospel initiated this way of spiritual life. In the second *memra*, John lists a number of rules which must have been associated with his monastery. The inclusion of these rules may suggest that ʿAbdishoʿ had become the fourth superior of the monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol and was seeking John's advice. Since *Resh Melle* was commissioned by Sabrishoʿ, it would appear that John was writing his *memre* on virginity and holiness at some later date, after the death of the latter.

2.2 Literary Works

In addition to *Resh Melle*, John bar Penkaye is credited with a number of additional works, some mentioned by him and others found in various extant sources. We will discuss these sources in chronological order.

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[297] Ibid.

2.2.1. John’s witness to his own works

In *Resh Melle*, John refers to two of his other works. At one point in his discussion of creation in the opening pages of Book I, John cuts short his discussion by referring to one of his own already finished works on that theme: “This has been said by us... in another book and it is not necessary to repeat it again” (ܘܐܬܐܡܪ ܗܘ̇ ܠܢ ܒܠܘܩܒܠܗܘܢ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ: ܘܠܐ ܐܠܝܨ ܐ ܕܬܘܒ ܗܢܝܢ ܒܗ ܗܢܝܢ ܢܬܢܐ) (fol. 5a). Likewise, he refers to a “book against [false] teachings that we composed a long time ago” (ܐܠܐ ܡܣܬܐܡܬܐ ܚܘܝܢ ܐܦ ܚܢ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܗܘ̇ ܕܥܒܕܢ ܡܢ ܟܒܪ ܙܒܢܝܢ ܠܘܩܒܠ ܡ̈ܠܦܢܘܬܐ) (fols. 6a-b),[298] a work that has not survived.

In his work *The Book on Virginity and Holiness* (included in BL manuscript OR 9385,[299] which also contains *Resh Melle*), John makes a reference to his *Book Against Sects*. John notes that his first intention was to include the contents of *On Virginity and Holiness* in his work *Against Sects*, but he refrained from doing so lest the work be too long. He distinguishes the aim of each work: “[the *Book Against Sects*] cleanses the mind from all error, and plants in it the truth of Christ and God, [while *On Virginity and Holiness*] separates the soul from all love of this world, and binds it with the love of Christ, which has no equal in strength” (fol. 157b).

2.2.2. The manuscript of Tabriz (1262 A.D.)

As discussed at greater length in chapter 3, a number of manuscripts containing *Resh Melle* made use of a manuscript copied in Tabriz which has now been lost. Three witnesses for this important manuscript contain additional works by John, and are discussed below:

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[298] This *Book Against [False] Teachings* corresponds to the fourth book in the list given in the *Catalogue* of ʿAbdishoʿ. See section 2.2.3.

[299] See section 2.2.2.1 for a discussion of this manuscript.

2.2.2.1 BL OR 9385

This is an extremely important manuscript since, in addition to *Resh Melle*, it includes a collection of fourteen *memre* attributed to John. Four of these fourteen comprise *The Book on Virginity and Holiness*, mentioned above. The titles of these fourteen *memre*, as given in the BL manuscript, are as follows: [1-4]: “Beneficial *memre* on virginity and holiness” (fols. 155b-190a); [5]: “*Memra* on Rabban Sabrishoʿ the founder of the holy *ʿumra* (monastery) of Kmol” (fols. 190a-196b); [6]: “On the hymn “We confess you O Lord of all”[300] (fols. 196b-202a); [7]: “On the New Sunday” (fols. 202a-210b); [8]: “A *Sogitha* on a dialogue of the Slanderer and the Church” (fols. 210b-220b); [9]: “On the Holy Spirit” (213a-220b); [10]: “On God is Holy, God is Mighty and God is Immortal, have mercy upon us” (fols. 220b-225b); [11]: “On [our] difficult age” (fols. 225b-230a); [12-13]: “On Repentance” (fols. 230a-234a; 234a-236b); [14]: “On Faith and concerning all our orthodox Fathers who worked and prospered through it” (fols. 236-244b).

There are strong reasons to affirm the authenticity of these fourteen *memre*.

i) First of all, they are compiled and grouped into one unit and follow directly after *Resh Melle* in the manuscript; the copyist (in 1262 A.D.) clearly understood all of the content as originating with one author. There is no colophon on the last folio of *Resh Melle* (155b), except a short notice which states: “By the help of our Lord, the composition of this work of John bar Penkaye is complete.” Immediately, the scribe continues with the following words: “[We write] beneficial *memre* of the same Mar Yoḥannan [entitled]: *On Virginity and Holiness.*” This work consists of four *memre*. The scribe then includes ten other *memre*, attributing each to John. Importantly, on folios 244b-245b, the modern copyist of BL 9385 transmits the early colophon in the manuscript that he produced in 1901 A.D. This colophon demonstrates that the entire content of the Tabriz manuscript [of which BL 9385 is a copy] was written "in the year 1573 AG [=1262 A.D.] at the Church in the city of Tabriz." On folios 246a-247a, the copyist of BL writes his own colophon. Mingana's partial edition of *Resh Melle* in *Sources Syriaques* (1908 A.D.) was based on a manuscript that claims to be copied from an earlier manuscript produced in 1840 A.D., which in turn was copied from the Tabriz manuscript. Likewise, the *Book of Partute* (i.e. fragments, crumbs) (1898 A.D.) includes a portion of John' *Resh Melle*, but in a footnote lists the titles of the same fourteen *memre* found in BL 9385. We may presume that, like the latter, the *Book of Partute* also depends on the manuscript of Tabriz. Thus, three independent witnesses to the important Tabriz manuscript are extant.

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[300] The hymn reads: “Thee, Lord of all, we confess, and Thee, Jesus Christ, we glorify; for Thou art the Quickener of our bodies, and Thou art the Saviour of our souls.” See *The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles Addai and Mari* (London: 1893; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1970), 3.

ii) The fact that ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, writing several decades later, does not mention any of these additional *memre* does not prove their inauthenticity, since he lists in his *Catalogue* John's complete works but not *memre* which are considered to be partial works. However by comparing the list of ʿAbdishoʿ with the contents of BL manuscript, the works of *Resh Melle* and Against Sects are identical. And since BL manuscript identifies the four-*memre On Virginity and Holiness* as a "Book", one wonders if it correspond to the sixth work in the list of ʿAbdishoʿ, "On Bonds and Perfection" (see section 2.2.3)?

iii) Within *On Virginity and Holiness*, an important note is preserved in its first *memra*: "For we were intending in that book that we composed a long time ago, *Against Sects* (ܠܘܩܒܠ ܕܚ̈ܠܬܐ) [which contains] with many ways and true answers..." (fols. 157a-b). The work referred to here by the author (*Against Sects*) is identical to the fourth work of John listed in the *Catalogue* of ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, (*Against Sects* (ܠܘܩܒܠ ܕܚ̈ܠܬܐ) (see 2.2.3). In *Resh Melle*, John himself refers to "[The] book *Against* [false] *Teachings* (ܠܘܩܒܠ ܡ̈ܠܦܢܐ) that we composed a long time ago" (fols. 6a-b). Although "Against Sects" and "Against Teachings" are clearly distinct titles, they could very well be referring to the same work. The original colophon of the Tabriz manuscript is preserved at the end of the BL manuscript, and includes the following words: "This volume is completed, and includes the two divisions of the temporal world history, and the *Book on Virginity and Holiness*, and other metric *memre* which are composed by the great one among intellectuals, who is well-known among the orthodox and famous among thinkers, the holy solitary Mar Yohannan, who was on the level of a truly renowned ascetic,[301] and who is named after his village, Penkaya" (fol. 244b).

iv) The fifth *memra* in BL 9385 (following the work of *Resh Melle* and the *Book on Virginity and Holiness*) is entitled: "*Memra* on Rabban Sabrishoʿ the founder of the holy *ʿumra* (monastery) of Kmol" (fols. 190a-196b). In this *memra*, the author supplies many details about the Monastery of Yoḥannan of Kmol and its earliest leaders, Yoḥannan of Kmol, Rabban ʿUkama, and two ascetics named Sabrishoʿ. It narrates how the monastery was constructed and how many monks came to reside there. Near the end of the *memra*, the author includes a farewell speech by one Sabrishoʿ in which he urged his fellow monks to accept the other Sabrishoʿ as the superior of their monastery: "Behold, submit to Sabrishoʿ who is among you, for he is also my brother, and together we laboured from a young age" (ܗܐ ܣܒܪܝܫܘܥ ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܒܟܘܢ ܠܗ ܐܫܬܥܒܕܘ: ܕܐܦ ܗܘ ܐܚܝ ܗܘ ܘܐܟܚܕܐ ܠܐܝܢ ܡܢ ܛܠܝܘܬܢ) (BL 196a). The author then adds a note that reflects his status as witness of these events: "That superior of the Monastery advised us like [his] sons: 'See, my brothers, that it was for your sake that I have laboured in this way" (ܐܝܟ ܕܠܒܢܝܐ ܡܪܬܝܬܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܢ ܗܘ ܪܫ ܒܥܘܡܪܐ: ܕܚܙܘ ܐܚܝ ܕܡܛܠܬܟܘܢ ܥܡܠܬ ܗܟܢ) (BL 196a). On the whole, the detailed description of this monastery and its members seems to have come from an insider, and thus could easily have been written by John himself.

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[301] This line is rather obscure in the Syriac: ܡܫܝܕܐ ܕܒܡ ܚܕ ܒܠܘܐ ܒܫܝܢܐ ܕܠܡܫܬܥܠܝܢ

v) The fourteenth *memra* in BL 9385 (following the work of *Resh Melle*) is entitled "On Faith and concerning all our Orthodox Fathers who worked and prospered through it" (fols. 236-244b). It lists a number of Greek and Syriac authors. The last Syriac author to be mentioned is Babai the Great (d. 628 A.D.). This is a strong indication that the *memra* was written by an author who lived during the seventh century A.D.

vi) The tenth *memra* in BL 9385 (following the work of *Resh Melle*) is "On Trisagion." The authenticity of this work is supported by the testimony of Addai Scher, who possessed a copy of this particular *memra* in a manuscript in his Library at Seért, and who attributed it to John bar Penkaye.

vii) BL includes three *memre* whose themes line up well with material that we find in Book XV of *Resh Melle*. These include the eleventh *memra*, entitled "On [our] difficult age" (fols. 225b-230a) and the twelfth (fols. 230a-234a) and thirteenth (fols. 234a-236b) *memre*, which are both entitled "On Rogation." In these three *memre*, the author emphasizes that God is causing his community to suffer through natural disasters since they continue to sin, being unjust and disloyal to Him. It is also interesting to note that in the twelfth *memra*, the author complains about *bnay haggar* (the Arabs) for their looting, destruction of villages and fields, killing and taking of captives (fol. 232a). All of this strongly suggests that the author was living in the context of the Arab Conquest and was deeply concerned with the state of his own community, features which match John's own testimony in *Resh Melle.*

2.2.2.2 The *Book of Partute*

The titles of thirteen of these *memre* are also listed in a footnote in a collection of extracts from East and West Syrian authors published by the Anglican mission in Urmia in 1898 entitled *The Book of Partute* ("Crumbs"). And like the BL manuscript, the *Book of Partute* consulted the 1262 Tabriz manuscript for its extract of *Resh Melle* and for its information about his other works, listed in the footnote. This list matches the contents of BL 9385, except that in the latter, there is an additional work included: "A Hymn on a dialogue between the Slanderer and the Church." This hymn, however, is presented as a kind of appendix to the previous *memra*. This may explain why the *Book of Partute* only lists thirteen *memre* by John. Since BL 9385 was copied in 1901, it could not have been consulted in the publication of the *Book of Partute*.

2.2.2.3 *Sources Syriaques* (1908)

In this collection of Syriac works, Mingana edited the text of books X-XV of *Resh Melle* and supplied a French translation of Chapter XV alone.[302] At the end of book XV of the Syriac edition (page 170), Mingana notes the following:

> This edition was based on a Syriac manuscript which was copied on October 12, 1840 A.D. Its copyist states that this particular manuscript was copied from an ancient manuscript which belonged to Beth Mar Shemʿon, the Catholicos. It was written in the year one thousand, five hundred and seventy-three to the Greeks, in the city of Tabriz by the hand of the famous physician Sabrishoʿ (priest).

2.2.3 ***Catalogue* of ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis (1298 A.D.)**[303]

Vööbus observes that ʿAbdishoʿ, "a prominent connoisseur of Syriac literature," acknowledges that John was sometimes confused with other authors bearing the same name, and that he attributes to each author his own list of works.[304] Thus ʿAbdishoʿ assigns the following seven works to John:

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[302] For the Syriac text, see Mingana, *Sources Syriaques,* vol. I:2, 1-204.

[303] ʿAbdishoʿ, *Catalogue*, *BO,* III/1, 1-362.

> John bar Penkaye wrote seven works: [1] *Education of the Young* (*mardutha daṭlaye*); [2] *Brief Words* (*resh melle*); [3] *The Merchant* (*taggara*);[305] [4] *Against Sects* (*luqwal deḥlatha*); [5] *The Seven Eyes of the Lord* (*shwaʿ ʿaynaw d-marya*); [6] *Bonds and Perfection* (*wad'asare wadshumlaya*); and [7] *Book of Questions* (= *Catechism*) (*kthawa dshu'ale*).

Clearly the fourth work on this list is identical with the work referred to by John in the *Book on Virginity and Holiness*. Moreover, it is quite possible that the *Book against [false] teachings* referred to by John himself in *Resh Melle* is the same work; the titles are very similar (ܠܘܩܒܠ ܕܚ̈ܠܬܐ and ܠܘܩܒܠ ܝܘ̈ܠܦܢܐ).

2.2.4 *The Pearl: on the Truth of Christianity* by ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis (written in 1292 A.D.)

Another work by John is referred to by ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis in Chapter V of this work. In Part III ('Refutation of the Foregoing Creeds'), he writes the following:

> Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye adduced the name of CHRIST, written with black and red ink, by way of illustrating this confused union in which the Jacobites believe, and the union of adherence in which we believe; thus, CHRIST, behold corruption! Behold confusion! Is it red ink? It is not. Is it black ink? It is not. Now look at this CHRIST. Behold beauty! Behold light! Is it black ink? It is. Is it red ink? It is.[306]

It is not clear to which of John's works ʿAbdishoʿ is referring. It must be one of those included in his *Catalogue*. Given the Christological subject matter, the two most likely candidates are *Against Sects* and *On Catechism*.

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[304] ʿAbdishoʿ, *Catalogue*, *Catalogue, BO*, III/1, 189-190 (John bar Penkaye) and 103-104 (John of Dalyatha); see also Vööbus, *HASO*, Part III, 334.

[305] Assemani, in his edition of the *Catalogue*, makes a slight error in reading the title of one of John's works. Instead of the book of *Taggara* (ܬܓܪܐ), he reads *egratha* (ܐܓܪ̈ܬܐ), i.e. *Letters*. Badger also makes an error by combining the titles of two works (*resh melle* and *taggara*) into one, i.e. "Words of a Merchant" (*The Nestorians and their Rituals*, vol. 2, (London: 1852; repr. London: Draft Publishers, 1987), 374. Joseph Qelayta, in his edition of the *Catalogue* in 1924, properly distinguishes between John's two works, "[the Book] *Resh Mell* and [the Book] of *the Merchant*", 77.

[306] ʿAbdishoʿ demonstrates how John has skilfully illustrated the unity of Christ's divinity and humanity in two natures. He points out that John wrote the word ܡܫܝܚܐ ('Christ'; *mshiḥa*) twice, the first time with a mixture of black and red (i.e. brown) ink, and the second time with black ink distinctly outlined with red ink.

2.2.5 *Anonymous Biography*

Jansma discusses a short biography of John that is extant in several manuscripts of West-Syrian origin, and which was edited three times.[307] According to Jansma, the variant readings among the manuscripts are not significant. From this biography[308] a long list of John's works can be extracted:

> [i] A letter against the demon of blasphemy; [ii] On the battle [against] adultery; [iii] Against all demons and their battles [against us]; [iv] On the virtue of holiness, in five books; [v] On perfection, in two books; [vi] Against sects, in two parts; [vii] On the Lamb; [viii] On the education of the young; [ix] The merchant, in seven *memre*; [x] A comprehensive meditation on the ascetic virtues; [xi] Many metrical *memre* and letters; [xii] the Book of *Resh Melle*; [xiii] A *memra* on lazy monks; [xiv] On the perfection of the divine virtues.

Most of these works are mentioned in other sources.

2.2.6 *Mingana* (i.e MMC), Syr. 47

This source includes a variety of works, including synodical acts and *memre* of some mystical authors such as Dadishoʿ Qaṭaraya (fols. 240b-247a), Evagrius (fols. 247a-248b), ʿAbdishoʿ the Seer (fols. 248b-252a), John bar Penkaye (fols. 252a-255b), and Shemʿon d-Ṭaybutha (fols. 255b-257b). The work by John included in this manuscript is an extract from *The Merchant*, which as we have seen also appears in the list of ʿAbdishoʿ. It is introduced as follows: "From the book of John bar Penkaye entitled *The Merchant* [taggara], which contains extracts of knowledge for study" (Mingana, Syr. 47, fol. 252a). The first *memra* is complete, and it has 100 short mystical and wisdom sayings, each preceded by a Syriac letter indicating its number, from 1 to 100. The second *memra* is incomplete, and the copyist seems to be somewhat confused about its contents. It begins with numbers 1-3, and then proceeds to give numbers 5, 82, 83, 92, 94, 97-101, 109. Then, however, a new set of numbers 1-3 is listed, followed by a note that “the second *memra* of *Taggara* is finished.” The large gap between numbers 5 and 82 probably represents missing or damaged folios. The second set of sayings 1-3 must be from another *memra*. Jansma identifies another manuscript which contains *The Merchant*: MS 237 of the Monastery of Notre Dame near Alqosh, copied in 1289 A.D. He states that only two *memre* of the work are preserved in this manuscript. I was not able to access this manuscript for this project, but it is quite possible that the scribe who copied Mingana Syr. 47 consulted it.

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[307] According to Jansma, "A very brief glance at the life and works of this Nestorian author was presented in a few manuscripts of Jacobite origin. This biography was edited three times and each time according to a different manuscript. The text of A. Scher was taken from a codex belonging to a Berlin collection (dated AD 1826). Rahmani based his edition on a manuscript from the library of the Jacobite Patriarchate in Mardin (copied in 1472). Finally, A. Scher published the life of John bar Penkaye based on a codex that he acquired from a Jacobite priest in Mifarqaṭ (date unknown)." See Jansma, *Projet d'edition du Ktaba d-Rēš melle*, 87-106.

[308] Here the edition of Addai Scher ("Notice") is being consulted. I have given the names of all the works that are mentioned, in order, but have omitted the biographer's additional comments.

2.2.7 **Mingana (i.e. MMC), Syr. 488** (*CMCM*, vol. I, 1933)

Contained in this manuscript is “A beneficial *memra* of Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye.” It consists of instructions and prohibitions for monks to follow. John presents himself as a monk in need of correction, as an example of what *not* to do. The main work contained in MMC, Syr. 488 is *The Book on Good Conduct* by another Yoḥannan, namely, John of Mosul (d. 1270).[309] The *memra* by John bar Penkaye is inserted (fols. 116a-125a) within this larger work (i.e. not at the end). *The Book on Good Conduct* and John’s *memra* were published in Rome in 1868 by the Chaldean archbishop Elijah Milus of Aqra (which is in northern Iraq). John’s *memra* appears on folios 162-171 of this edition.

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[309] MMC, Syr. 488, fols. 116a-125a.

2.2.8 ***The Book of Ḥudra***[310]

In first volume of the liturgical book of *Ḥudra*, a hymn chanted during both the Feast of Nativity and the Feast of Epiphany[311] begins with *shrara galya baddeq bar ʻalaha lʿete damkhar* ("The Son of God has proclaimed a true revelation to His Church that He betrothed..."). The theme of the *memra* is Christological, elaborating on the divine and human natures of Christ, citing events from the Gospel to support its argument. A large number of the hymns and prayers in the Ḥudra bear the names of their authors, but there are many others that are anonymous. In 1924, Joseph Qelaytha published an edition of *The Pearl* by ʿAbdishoʿ along with a selection of other *memre* by various authors. One of these *memre* is identical with the hymn from the *Ḥudra* just mentioned. Qelaytha does not mention the link with the *Ḥudra*, but he does include some information about its author. The hymn is introduced as follows: "It is said (ܡܬܐܡܪܐ) [that this hymn] is composed by Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye"[312]. These are not the words of Qelaytha, but those of his unnamed source (perhaps an older edition of *The Book of Ḥudra*). Presumably drawing on Qelaytha, Aboona, in his discussion of John in his work *Aramaic* [*Syriac*] *Literature* (published in Arabic in 2nd edition: 1996), attributes the hymn to John and acknowledges that it is also found in the *Ḥudra.* If indeed John is the author of this hymn, then his prestige is certainly enhanced within the Syriac tradition.

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[310] According to Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors* (Syr. 78-88), the *Book of Ḥudra* was organized by Ishoʿyahb III (649-659 A.D.) with the assistance of Rabban ʿEnanishoʿ, who was commissioned by Giwargis I (660-681) the Catholicos to compile *The Paradise of the Fathers*, (see *AMS*, vol. 7). However, the *Book of Ḥudra* is the official liturgical prayer book for the whole year according the rites and rituals of the Church of the East. Its modern edition includes thousands of pages, including hundred of hymns that belongs to earlier authors such as Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe (d. 344 A.D.), Ephrem (d. 373), Narsai (d. 503), Aba I (d. 552) and Babai (d. 628). *Ḥudra* also includes hymns of later authors such as Rabban Brikh-Ishoʿ of the Monastery of Beth Quqa (d. 14th century) and Giwargis Warda (d. early 14th century).

[311] *Ḥudra*, vol. I, 562-565.

[312] See ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, *The Book of Pearl: On the Truth of Christianity, and a Collection of Beneficial Memre,* ed. by Joseph Qelaytha, (Mosul: Assyrian Press, 1924), 108.

2.2.9 Library of Seʿert

Addai Scher informs us that his library in Seʿert had preserved two *memre* attributed to John: "*On* [the monk's] *Cell*', and another entitled "*God is Holy*" (*Trisagion*?).[313] The second of these is also found in BL 9385.

2.2.10 Summary of Bibliographical Evidence

Here is a summary of the evidence discussed above:

John's works according to the *Catalogue* of ʿAbdishoʿ:

1) *Education of the Young* (also mentioned in the *Anonymous Biography*)
2) *Resh Melle* (also mentioned in the *Anonymous Biography*)
3) *The Merchant* (also mentioned in the *Anonymous Biography*, but is described there as consisting of seven *memre*; contained in part in Mingana Syr. 47)
4) *Against Sects* (also mentioned in the *Anonymous Biography*, but is described there as consisting of two parts)
5) *The Seven Eyes of the Lord*
6) *Bonds and Perfection*
7) *Book of Questions*

John's works according to BL 9385 (which represents the Tabriz manuscript):

8) *Book on virginity and holiness* (four *memre*)
9) A *memra* on Rabban Sabrishoʿ the founder of the holy *ʿUmra* (monastery) of Kmol
10) On the hymn "We confess you O Lord of all"
11) A *memra* on The New Sunday
12) A sogitha on a dialogue between the Slanderer and the Church
13) A *memra* on the Holy Spirit
14) On the Trisagion
15) A *memra* on [our] difficult age.
16) Two *memre* on Repentance
17) A *memra* on Faith

John's own testimony in *Resh Melle*:

18) A Book *On Creation*

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[313] See Scher, *De la Chaldee et de l'Assyrie*, 299.

The testimony of Mingana Syr. 488:

19) A beneficial *memra* of Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye

The testimony of *Ḥudra*:

20) A hymn that begins with *shrara galya baddeq bar ʻalaha lʿete damkhar* ("The Son of God has proclaimed a true revelation to His Church that He betrothed...")

The testimony of Addai Scher:

21) Two *memre* on [the monk's] cell

The testimony of the *Anonymous Biography*[314] (works mentioned already by other witnesses are not included here):

22) A letter against the demon of blasphemy
23) On the battle [against] adultery
24) Against all demons and their battles [against us]
25) On the virtue of holiness, in five books (perhaps identical with no. 8 above)
26) On perfection, in two books (perhaps identical with no. 6 above)
27) On the Lamb
28) A comprehensive meditation on the ascetic virtues
29) Many metrical *memre* and letters
30) A *memra* on lazy monks (content of no. 19 matches this theme)
31) On the perfection of the divine virtues

2.3 John's importance for modern scholarship

At least one of John's works was consulted by Joseph Ḥazzaya (8th century), Ishoʿdad of Merv (9th century), George of Arbela (10th century), ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis (d. 1318), Isaac Shabdnaya (15th century), and, as mentioned above, one of his hymns may have been incorporated in the book of *Ḥudra*. This recognition of John proves that he had an established place within the East Syrian tradition. In modern scholarship, early studies of *Resh Melle* were carried out by Anton Baumstark (1901), Addai Scher (1907), and Alphonse Mingana (1908). In an important article in 1963, T. Jansma announced his intention to produce a critical edition of *Resh Melle*. This was never done, but his article remains foundational for the modern study of John. More recently, discussions by Sebastian Brock (1987), Robert Hoyland (1997), Lutz Greisiger (2007), and many others testify to a growing appreciation of John's importance.[315] Here we will briefly discuss John's importance for several areas of modern scholarship. A more extensive discussion of the multiple genres of *Resh Melle* is provided in chapter four.

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[314] This work is found only in the West-Syrian tradition.

2.3.1 A Historian

John recounts the persecutions of Christianity within the Roman Empire before Constantine. Thus, in folio 136b, he says that "the persecution of the wicked Emperors" (ܪ̈ܕܘܦܝܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܟܐ ܪ̈ܫܝܥܐ) against the Church "went from Emperor Nero [54-68 A.D.] until the Diocletian dynasty" (ܕܒܝܬ ܕܝܘܩܠܛܝܢܘܣ)[316] and ended "by the diligence of the victorious and faithful Emperor, Constantine" (ܒܝܕ ܥܡܠ ܠܒܝܒܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܙܟܝܐ ܘܩܘܣܛܢܛܝܢܘܣ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܗܝܡܢܐ).[317] John also says that "there were many synods before that of Nicea, but [they were] not universal" (ܗܘ̈ܘ ܣܓܝ̈ܐܢ ܟܢܘ̈ܫܝܐ ܐܦ ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܗܘ ܕܢܝܩܝܐ ܦܢ̈ܝܬܐ. ܒܪܡ ܠܘ ܬܒܝ̈ܠܝܐ) (fol. 145a).[318] He states that with Emperor Constantine, "the trumpet of the Church's [victory] was highly exalted" (ܐܬܬܪܝܡܬ ܩܪܢܗ ܕܥܕܬܐ), and "joy came to the churches of the west [i.e. those in the Roman Empire]" (ܗܘ̈ܬ ܚܕܘܬܐ ܠܥܕ̈ܬܐ ܕܡܥܪܒܐ). As a consequence of this great change, he says, "the churches which were demolished were rebuilt, the holy temples were completed, the altars were repaired, the preachers of the truth lifted their heads up, and the flock of Christ was likened to sheep over whom a gloomy Winter had passed and which was drawing near to Spring" (ܘܥܕ̈ܬܐ ܕܡܣܚܦܢ ܗܘ̈ܝ، ܐܬܒܢܝ: ܘܗܝܟ̈ܠܐ ܘܕܝ̈ܪܐ ܐܫܬܟܠܠܘ. ܘܡܕܒ̈ܪܢܐ ܛܝܒܘ. ܘܓܘ̈ܕܐ ܕܚܐܪ̈ܐ ܐܬܬܩܝܡ ܪܫܡܗܘܢ. ܘܐܬܬܕܡܝ ܡܢ ܚܝܠܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ: ܠܟܢ̈ܫܐ ܕܓܒܪ ܒܥܠܡܗ ܫܒܬܘܬܐ ܒܡܥܪܐ ܘܡܚܝܬ ܠܢܫܡ.).[319] What John says here is clearly drawn from the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius. It should be kept in mind, however, that other Syriac sources dealing with this early period, including a number of hagiographical accounts that describe persecutions in the regions of Edessa and Nisibis, may have been available to John at this time.[320]

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[315] See "A Comprehensive Bibliography on Syriac Christianity" at the Hebrew University website (http://www.csc.org.il). In this bibliography over thirty studies on John bar Penkaye are currently listed.
[316] For an analysis of the persecution of Christians in the Roman empire before Constantine, see Frend, *The Early Church*, "A Decade of Persecution: 249-59 [A.D.]", 95-114, and "The Great Persecutio: 303-12 [A.D.]", 115-125.
[317] This must refer to the 'Edict of Milan' in 313 A.D. Ibid., 124.
[318] John's awareness of earlier local synods in the Roman Empire must have been derived from the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius.

John then shifts his attention to the suffering of Christians in Mesopotamia in the Persian Empire.[321] He states that persecution of Christians in the East began during the reign of Shapur II (309-379 A.D.), which implies that there were no major earlier persecutions in Persian Mesopotamia before this. However, on the magnitude of the later persecution, John says:

> The discourse on those things which this [Shapur] dared to enact against the faithful which were in his region would require many learned men to deliver (fols. 136b-137a).
>
> .ܕܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܝܢ ܐܡܪܚ ܗܘܐ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܒܡܗܝܡ̈ܢܐ ܕܒܐܘܚܕܢܗ: ܥܠ ܣܘܦܩܘܬܐ ܣܦܪ̈ܐ.

He continues to describe this Christian suffering in more detail:

> When Shapur the Persian became emperor, his obsession with Magianism [was great]. He [wanted] to cause grief for the Christian Emperor of the West (by which I mean Constantine) by taking on the [same] zeal as [Constantine] and [proclaiming] a war against the Christians [in his Empire]. For he considered our slaughter as equivalent to the killing of the sons and brothers of Emperor Constantine, and thought [of this] as a kind of revenge.[322] Thus, [Shapur] forced the faithful either to worship the mute idols of sun and

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[319] See the *Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius*, Book X, 1-3. On Pre-Nicene Church history, all Syriac authors depend on Eusebius' work, either directly or through secondary sources. It is interesting that in the introduction to the Synod of Isaac in 410 A.D., almost the same description of the end of the great persecution in Persia is given in the Synod of Mar Isaac (410 A.D.), see *SO,* Syr. 17-18.

[320] These Syriac accounts may include: "The Account of Shemʿon Kepa [Simon Peter] the Chief of the Apostles" (*AMS*, vol. I, 1-33), "The Account of Mar Pawlos [Paul] the Holy Apostle" (*AMS*, vol. I, 34-44), "The Account of Sharbel the Martyr [105 A.D.]" (*AMS*, vol. I, 95-119), "The Account of the Blessed Ignatius of Antioch" (*AMS*, vol. III, 199-214), "The Martyrdom of Ḥabib the Deacon [309 A.D.]" (*AMS*, vol. I, 144-60), "The Account of Mar Giwargis [George] the Holy Martyr" (*AMS*, vol. I, 277-300), "The Martyrdom of Febronia the Martyr, in the reign of Diocletian" (*AMS*, vol. V, 573-615).

[321] Here John is clearly using Syriac accounts since Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* only discusses early Christian history within the Roman Empire.

[322] This kind of behaviour has continued to the present day. In recent decades, peaceful Christians in Iraq and indeed across the Middle East, those who are native to the land, are often targeted and persecuted by extremist Muslims who associate their Christian religion with western political powers.

> fire, or to prepare their necks for the sword.[323] This [emperor] presented many martyrs to Christ; however he was despised by many [who] disregarded his threats. And since he had killed their shepherd, they too were oppressed... like lambs for slaughtering. They were not afraid, nor did they exchange the worship of their God for [the worship of] that which was not God. For sixty[324] years the sword [of Shapur] remained drawn against our people, and his soul was not sated by our blood (fol. 137a).
>
> ܒܕ ܓܝܪ ܒܕ ܡܦܠ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܥܒܕܘ ܦܘܩܕܢܐ: ܡܛܠ ܥܘܡܬܗ ܕܟܪܝܣܛܝܢܘܬܐ: ܘܡܛܠ ܗ̇, ܕܢܬܠ ܚܣܝ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܒܘܣܠܝܢܐ
> ܗ̇ܘ ܕܡܩܪܒܐ ܐܡܪ ܐ̄ܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܡܣܗܕܢܘܬܗ: ܠܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܡܦܠ ܚܠܘܗܝ; ܐܦ ܡܪܒܐ ܕܚܡ ܒܣܗܕܝܢܐ. ܗܓܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܣܓܝܐܐ
> ܗ̄ܘܬ ܠܗ ܒܓܘܢ: ܐܢܫ ܗܘ ܕܠܓܒܘܗܝ, ܘܠܐܣܝܘܗܝ, ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܣܗܕܢܘܬܐ ܡܛܠ ܗ̄ܘܐ. ܘܡܣܬܒܪܐ ܡܪܡ ܠܗܕܐ ܣܓܝ
> ܗ̄ܘܐ. ܚܢܝܐ ܗ̄ܘܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܓܝܪ ܠܡܢܟܣܬܐ: ܕܐܘ ܢܬܟܪܘܢ ܠܦܠܚܢܐ: (ܐܘ ܠܐܣܛܘܟܣܐ) ܣܓܝܐܐ ܕܥܡܥܡܐ ܘܕܢܘܪܐ:
> ܐܘ ܢܛܝܒܘܢ ܨܘܪܝܗܘܢ ܠܣܝܦܐ. ܗܢܐ ܓܝܪ ܣܗܕܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܩܪܒ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ. ܐܬܬܫܝܛ ܕܝܢ ܡܢ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܘܒܣܪܘ
> ܥܠ ܠܘܡܬܗ. ܘܓܒܗ, ܕܠܪܥܝܗܘܢ ܟܥܝܢܬܗ ܩܛܠ: ܐܦ ܗܢܘܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܐܝܟ ܐܡܪܐ ܠܢܟܣܬܐ ܐܬܕܒܪܘ. ܘܠܐ ܕܚܠܘ
> ܘܠܐ ܫܚܠܦܘ ܦܠܚܢܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܗܘܢ ܒܠܐ ܐܠܗܐ. ܫܬܝܢ ܓܝܪ ܫܢܝܢ ܗܘܬ ܫܠܝܦܐ ܣܝܦܗ ܒܕ ܥܡܝܠܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܢ: ܘܠܐ ܣܒܥܬ ܢܦܫܗ
> ܡܢ ܕܡܢ.

Although John makes no reference to any Catholicos by name, the "shepherd" mentioned here must be Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe, the bishop of Seleucia who was martyred in 344 A.D. Undoubtedly, John is drawing from early accounts, including the *Martyrdom of Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe.*[325]

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[323] *Die Chronik Von Arbela,* (Syr. 52-3) states that "without mercy a command was issued [by Shapur II] to the *mobeds* [heads of the Magi] of the provinces [in Persia] that Christians are to be killed without pity and their churches destroyed. And on the 6th of the month of April (Nisan), when the king was in Beth Huzaye, in the 31st year of the reign of this wicked one [i.e. 340 A.D.] who never knew in his life what is mercy, the sword began to consume [them] without mercy."

[324] The East-Syrian tradition is not consistent in regard to the duration of persecution. References to 'a forty-year persecution' almost certainly represent the period from soon after the death of Constantine (d. 337 A.D.) until the death of Shapur (d. 379 A.D.). *The Chronicle of Arbela*, for example, states that this persecution began on the 6th of April, 340 A.D. Likewise, the *Chronicle of Seʿret* states that "when the Emperor Constantine died [337], the wicked Shapur revealed the evil within himself and began [a persecution] in the thirty-first year of his reign [i.e. 340]. He went [against] the Christians and destroyed the churches..." (I, XXIII, 77-9). According to John, however, there was a "seventy-year persecution" during the entire reign of the Shapur II: "...[T]he sword of Shapur, the Persian king, lasted seventy year against us" (ܒܕ ܓܝܪ ܫܒܥܝܢ ܫܢܝܢ ܐܫܬܡܠܝܬ ܥܠܝܢ ܣܝܦܗ ܕܫܒܘܪ ܡܠܟܐ ܦܪܣܝܐ) (fol. 140a). Confusingly, in another place he refers to a different length of time for the persecution: "For sixty years, his [i.e Shapur's] sword remained extended against our people" (ܫܬܝܢ ܓܝܪ ܫܢܝܢ ܗܘܬ ܫܠܝܦܐ ܣܝܦܗ ܒܕ ܥܡܝܠܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܢ) (fol. 137a). If we assume that the persecution ended with the death of Shapur, a sixty year period would take us back to 319 A.D. Intriguingly, Mari bin Suliaman states in his *Chronicle* that "In his days [i.e., the days of Papa the Catholicos] the victorious Emperor Constantine became a Christian, and after he had ruled for six years, there was an assembly of three hundred and eighteen [bishops; i.e. the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.]" (وفي أيامه تنصّر الملك الزكي قسطنطين وبعد ملكه بستة سنين كان اجتماع الثلثماية والثمانية عشر), see Mari, *The Book of Majdal*, 8. This implies that, according to this source at least, Constantine was converted in 319 A.D.

[325] John is certainly using historical accounts that were available in his time, such as the "Martyrdom of Shimʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe" (*AMS*, vol. II, 131-207), which, like all of the early Persian martyr acts, is traditionally attributed to Marutha of Mepharqaṭ (see *AMS*, vol. II, 57-396). The memory of *Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe* must have been incorporated soon after his death into the liturgical commemorations of saints and martyrs of the Church of the East. The Book of *Ḥudra*, which was organized by Ishoʿyahb (649-659 A.D.), includes such a commemoration (see *Ḥudra*, vol. III, 370-392). For a recent discussion of the sources for the martyrdom of Shimʿon, see Kyle Smith, *The Martyrdom and The History of Blessed Simeon Bar Ṣabbaʿe*.

John also provides an account of how the Patriarchate in Seleucia-Ctesiphon became independent of Antioch:

> On the third year of the ruling of Constantine the faithful Emperor [i.e. 309 A.D.], Shapur the Magi ruled in Persia... For some time, the patriarchal see which is in Syria [i.e. Antioch] had recognized the Church of Kokhe which is in the East. This was due to the enmity that existed between the empires of the East and the West, for they were against each other at all times. Many bishops had been killed as they were travelling from here to there [i.e from Persia to Syria] and from there to here, for the patriarch was far away [in Syria]. The [Persians] were making an accusation against them: 'Behold, these [bishops] are spies'.[326] But in fact they were doing this since they were thirsty for the blood of these holy ones. Thus, the bishop-fathers, saddened by the massacre of their companions, commanded that the Patriarch at the Church of Kokhe have authority over the [bishops] of the East, as the ecclesiastical laws command (fols. 136b-137a).
>
> ܒܫܢܬ ܬܠܬ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܗ ܕܩܘܣܛܢܛܝܢܘܣ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܗܝܡܢܐ: ܐܡܠܟ ܒܦܪܣ ܫܒܘܪ ܡܓܘܫܐ. ܕܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܝܢ ܐܚܪܢ ܗܘܐ ܠܡܫܪ ܒܡܘܡܬܢܐ ܕܒܐܘܣܝܗ: ܥܠ ܗܘܦܩܛܐ ܣܓ̈ܝܐܐ ܗܝܡܢܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܢܬܠܟܘܢ. ܡܛܠ ܓܝܪ ܕܡܕܡ ܘܒܢܐ ܐܘܪܪܡ ܒܘܪܗܢܐ ܕܦܛܪܝܪܟܘܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܣܘܪܝܐ ܠܒܝܬܐ ܕܟܘ̈ܟܐ ܗܕܐ ܕܒܡܕܢܚܐ: ܒܥܠܬܐ ܕܒܥܠܕܒܒܘܬ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܘܕܡܥܪܒܐ: ܠܥܘܠܡ ܓܝܪ ܚܕ̈ܕܐ ܐܬܟܬܫܝܢ ܗ̄ܘܘ، ܒܟܠܗܘܢ: ܐܦܣܩܘܦܐ ܓܝܪ ܣܓ̈ܝܐܐ ܡܬܩܛܠܝܢ ܗ̄ܘܘ ܡܟܐ ܕܡܪܕܝܢ ܗ̄ܘܘ ܡܟܐ ܠܬܡܢ. ܘܡܢ ܬܡܢ ܠܟܐ ܒܥܠܬ ܡܒܥܕܘܬܗ ܕܦܛܪܝܪܟܐ. ܡܫܟܚܝܢ ܗ̄ܘܘ ܓܝܪ ܥܠܝܗܘܢ ܥܠܬܐ: ܕܗܐ ܠܡ ܓܫ̈ܘܫܐ ܐܢܘܢ. ܒܫܪܪܐ ܕܝܢ ܟܕ ܨܗܝܢ ܗ̄ܘܘ ܠܕܡܐ ܕܠܗܘܢ ܕܩܕ̈ܝܫܐ ܗܕܐ ܥܒܕܝܢ ܗ̄ܘܘ. ܐܒܗ̈ܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܐܦܣܩܘܦܐ ܟܕ ܟܪܝܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܥܠ ܩܛܠܬܐ ܕܫܘܬܦܝܗܘܢ: ܦܩܕ ܕܦܛܪܝܪܟܐ ܒܥܕܬܐ ܕܟ̈ܘܟܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܫܠܝܛ ܥܠ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ: ܐܝܟ ܕܦܩܕܝܢ ܢܡܘ̈ܣܐ ܥܕ̈ܬܢܝܐ.

John's sources for the account just quoted must have been the early synods of the Church of the East, such as the *Synod of Dadisho*ʿ in 424 A.D., the *Canons Ascribed to Marutha of Mipharqaṭ*, and perhaps the *Chronicle of Arbela*. The text of the *Synod of Dadisho*ʿ claims that a certain letter from "western fathers" was read during the synod to justify the authority of the Patriarch of Seleucia over all bishops in Persia. This letter is presented as having been written during the tenure of Papa (bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon), a century earlier.[327] Likewise, the *Chronicle of Arbela* mentions a letter from bishops in the Roman Empire in support of the authority of Papa over all bishops in the Persian Empire.[328] The *Canons Ascribed to Marutha* is a Syriac translation of the canons of Nicea, with certain modifications, preserved in the East Syrian tradition. Marutha was a bishop from Roman Armenia who attended the Synod of Isaac convened in Seluecia-Ctesiphon in 410 A.D. According to this version of events, the bishop of Seleucia was given patriarchal status at the Nicene Council itself, but there is no mention of Papa.[329] John is unique among all sources in that he dates the granting of authority to the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (i.e. Kokhe) to the period *before* the beginning of the rule of Shapur II (309 A.D.).

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[326] *Die Chronik Von Arbela* (Syr. 53) states that the Jews and the Manicheans urged the Mobeds to persuade the King not to end the persecution: "For all Christians [in Persia] are spies of the Romans, and nothing happens in the [Persian] Empire that they do not write about to their brothers there." See *Die Chronik Von Arbela*, ed. and trans. Peter Kaweraw, CSCO 468 SS 200 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCOS, 1985).

[327] See "The Synod of Dadishoʿ", *Synodicon orientale*, Syr. 46. For a recent study of this important text, see Kyle Smith, "The Synod of Dādīšoʿ - 424 CE," http://www.academia.edu/5098272/The_Synod_of_Mar_ Dādīšo_424_CE [accessed October 30, 2014].

[328] See *Die Chronik Von Arbela*, Syr. 46-47.

It is worth asking how John would have understood the references to a letter from western bishops found in *Synod of Dadishoʿ* and the *Chronicle of Arbela.* In his discussion of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), John demonstrates that Christianity was divided into three different groups separated by Christology. He identifies the "easterners" (ܡܕܢ̈ܚܝܐ) with his own tradition, the Church of the East. He subdivides the "westerners" (ܡܥܪ̈ܒܝܐ) into two different Christological confessions, and although he does not name them, the reference is obviously to Monophysite and Chalcedonian groups. Interestingly, John also distinguishes, among the Arabs, between 'easterners' (ܡܕܢ̈ܚܝܐ) (those within Mesopotamia) and 'westerners' (ܡܥܪ̈ܒܝܐ) (those to the west of the Euphrates, i.e. those in Syria within the Roman Empire). The distinction that John makes between eastern and western groups of either Christians or Arabs suggests that the "western fathers" mentioned in the Synod of Dadishoʿ may have been understood by him to be referring to Syriac-speaking bishops living within the Roman Empire, and not western bishops in general (i.e. any bishop from the Roman Empire). This would agree with his lack of any mention of the Council of Nicea in connection with the granting of authority to the bishop of Seleucia-

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[329] See canon three of *The Canons Ascribed to Marutha of Mepharqaṭ*, CSCO 439-440 SS 191-192, ed. and trans. Arthur Vööbus, (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1982).

Ctesiphon. Examples of such 'western fathers' in this more restricted sense include Marutha (mentioned above) and 'Aqaq of Amid, who attended the Synod of Yab'alaha (420 A.D.).

John also provides an interesting perspective on the treaty that was agreed upon by Jovian and Shapur II in 363 A.D. after the death of Julian. One of its conditions was that the city of Nisibis would be ceded to the Persians:

> For the city of Nisibis was ceded to the Persians by Jovian the righteous Emperor instead of [i.e. to bring to an end] the blood of the churches of Christ, and in this way our Lord brought salvation to his Church. Immediately the Emperor [Jovian] commanded, 'Let the bishops return from their exile, let the gates of the churches be opened, and let the customary rituals be fully observed, let the faithful be in peace, and let the preachers preach the word of God without ceasing to both believers and unbelievers.' In the same way, these things [were implemented] in the Church of the East. Thus the holy [liturgy], which was humbled by the enemies of truth, was exalted, and became tranquility, and rest came to the churches of the West and of the East (fols. 140a-b).[330]
>
> ܐܬܝܗܒܬ ܓܝܪ ܢܨܝܒܝܢ ܡܕܝܢ̄ܬܐ ܒܗ ܒܗܿܘ ܙܒܢܐ ܡܢ ܝܘܒܝܢܘܣ ܡܠܟܐ ܙܕܝܩܐ ܠܦܪ̈ܣܝܐ: ܚܠܦ ܕܡܐ ܕܥܕ̈ܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ.
> ܟܕ ܕܝܢ ܒܗܢܐ ܦܘܪܣܐ ܝܗܒ ܡܪܢ ܦܘܪܩܢܐ ܠܥܕܬܗ. ܒܪܫܥܬܗ ܦܩܕ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܚܣ̈ܝܐ ܡܢ ܐܟܣܘܪܝܐ ܢܬܦܢܘܢ: ܘܬܪ̈ܥܐ
> ܕܥܕ̈ܬܐ ܢܬܦܬܚܘܢ: ܘܗܠܝܢ ܕܥܝܕܐ ܢܫܬܡܠܝܢ. ܘܡܗܝܡ̈ܢܐ ܒܫܠܡܐ ܢܗܘܘܢ. ܘܟܪ̈ܘܙܐ ܕܠܐ ܫܠܡ ܢܟܪܙܘܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ.
> ܠܡܗܝܡ̈ܢܐ ܐܟܚܕ ܘܠܠܐ ܡܗܝܡ̈ܢܐ: ܒܗ̇ ܒܕܡܘܬܐ ܗܢ̈ܝܢ ܟܕ ܗܘ ܒܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ. ܘܐܬܪܘܡܡ ܩܘܕܫܐ ܗܘ ܕܡܬܡܟܟ
> ܗ̄ܘܐ ܡܢ ܒܥܠܕܒ̈ܒܘܗܝ ܕܫܪܪܐ. ܘܗܘܐ ܫܠܝܐ ܘܢܘܚܐ ܠܥܕ̈ܬܐ ܕܡܥܪ̈ܒܐ ܘܕܡܕܢܚܐ.

Both Socrates and Sozomen, in their ecclesiastical histories, include an account of this treaty of 363 A.D., but although each of them mention the ceding of territory to Persia, neither makes any connection between this event and the end of persecution for the Christians of the Persian Empire.

2.3.2 A Theologian

Looking at the seven works of John listed in the *Catalogue* of ʿAbdishoʿ, there is one that may be singled out as a theological work: *Against Sects* (ܠܘܩܒܠ ܕܪ̈ܫܬܐ). This work is now lost. If it was like other works in its genre,[331] *Against Sects* (which the anonymous biography of John states was in two parts) may have been designed as a kind of reference work consisting of sections that varied in length. These sections would have been pedagogical and apologetic in their genre and would have, of course, reflected the doctrine of the Church of the East. Thus they would have dealt with Church doctrine, especially Christology, and would have argued against heresies such as Manichaeism and perhaps even Messalianism.[332]

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[330] See "Mar Eusebius the Martyrd Pope", *AMS*, vol. 6, 218-297; *A Selection from the Syriac Julian Romance*, ed. Richard J. H. Gottheil, (Leiden: Brill, 1906).

[331] According to the *Catalogue* of ʿAbdishoʿ, in *BO*, III/1, 169, among the works of Bar-Ḥadshabbaʿ is "A Disputation Against All Sects and [their] Refutation."

In his *Book of the Pearl*, ʿAbdishoʿ describes John as a "skilled theologian." It is significant that we find this description in section three, which is devoted to a discussion of the dispensation [of God] which is in Christ, which was of perennial theological importance. ʿAbdishoʿ, who died in 1318 A.D., could have invoked any number of theologians from the Church of the East, but he singles out John as having given the best illustration of the unity of the two natures of Christ.

John is also cited fourteen times by the fifteenth century author Isaac Shabadnaya in his long metric hymn entitled *A Hymn on the Divine Dispensation from the Beginning until Eternity.*[333]

As discussed above, there is also a tradition which identifies John as the author of one of the *memre* in the *Ḥudra*. The hymn in question presents evidence for the two natures of Christ from the Gospels.

Likewise, the new material in *BL* (see above) includes *memre* which contain significant theological reflection. *On the New Sunday* (fols. 202a-210b) is concerned with... *A Sogītha* (ܣܘܓܝܬܐ; *hymn*) *of the memra* (fols. 210b-213a); *On the Holy Spirit* (fols. 213a-220b), ...; *On God, who is Holy, Almight, Holy and immortal, Have Mercy upon us* (fols. 221b-225b); *On the Difficult Time* (fols. 225b-230a); *On Rogation* (fols. 230a-234a); *On Rogation* (fols. 234b-236b). These (seven) theological *memre* and (one) *sogītha* are written in 7 syllable metric. They are interpretations through which John clearly does express his theology. These *memre* are similar to those which Narsai and Jacob of Serug had written.

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[332] On various heresies as understood by a 6th-century author, see Barḥadbešabba, *La première partie de l'histoire ecclésiastique*, ed. and trans. F. Nau, (Paris, PO, 1932, repr. Turnhout: Editions Brepols, 1977), 186-99 [10-23]. For a discussion of Messalianism, see 1.2.2.

[333] MMC, Syr. 57, (156-7) wrote a short description of the manuscript and its author. He provides a list of authors quoted in the work. Among many other earlier authors, Isaac quotes John bar Penkaye fourteen times, in folios: 16a, 16b, 18a, 19a, 29b, 31a, 39a, 44b, 48b, 49b, 50b, 102a, 104b and 105b. For a general introduction to this author, see T. A. Carlson, "Isaac Shabadnaya", *GEDSH*, 214-5.

In addition to these four sources, this thesis will demonstrate (see Chapter IV) that the *Resh Melle* provides further evidence of John's qualification as a theologian.

2.3.3 An Exegete

In his interpretation of Exodus 4:24, Ishoʿdad of Merv, an important 9th century exegete, cites a passage from *Resh Melle*.[334] John thus takes his place as an exegetical authority, at least in the mind of Ishoʿdad, who quotes many early well-known authors, whether Greek or East-Syrian. Among the seven works of John listed by ʿAbdishoʿ, none can be said to be obviously exegetical. The titles of most patristic exegetical works included a term such as, 'commentary', 'exegesis', 'exposition', or 'interpretation'. Thus attributes to Narsai "An Exposition of the Mysteries and Baptism" (ܦܘܫܩ ܐܪ̈ܙܐ ܘܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ) and to Ishoʿdad "A Commentary on the New [Testament]." Although the titles of John's works as given by ʿAbdishoʿ provide no clear evidence that John was known as an exegete, *Resh Melle* itself shows that John was very interested in the interpretation of biblical texts. In one place, John says, "We are not exegetes" (ܠܘ ܚܢܢ ܡܦܫ̈ܩܢܐ ܐܝܬܝܢ) (fol. 116a). This expression can be taken as a rhetorical expression of the author's humility. But since there is no evidence that John produced any commentaries on biblical books, this statement may reflect John's own self-understanding. Earlier in his work, in his discussion of the similarity between the prophecy of Balaam in the Book of Numbers 24:7-9 and that of Jacob in the Book of Genesis 49:9-12, he had said, "This ought to be said briefly lest we lengthen our *memra*, since many accounts are set before us to be clarified, but we are obliged to make their commentary concise." (ܥܬܝܕܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܦܘܫܩܐ ܦܫܝܩܝܢ ܘܩܛܝܢܝܢ ܕܢܗܘܘܢ. ܒܪ ܓܒܘܢ ܐܠܐ ܐ ܕܒܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ ܢܟܬܒ ܒܗܪܗܘܢ) (fol. 55a). In another passage, John says, "We do not set out to interpret, but only to collect proofs which support our account" (ܠܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܢܦܫܘܩ ܗܘܝܢܢ ܠܗ. ܐܠܐ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܕܢܟܢܫ ܬܚܘܝܬܐ ܕܠܫܘܝܢ ܠܫܪܪܢ) (fol. 74b). In yet another place, however, John does claim to be doing exegesis, but reminds his readers that he is not introducing anything that is inconsistent with the Holy Scriptures:

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[334] John's interpretation of Exodus 4:24-25 (fols. 50b-51b) is quoted by the 9th century East-Syrian interpreter Ishoʿdad in his, *Commentaire sur l'ancien testament, II, exode-deutéronome,* CSCO 179 SS 81, ed. and trans. Ceslas Van Den Eynde, (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1958).

> According to our ability, we will offer an interpretation and commentary while warning ourselves not to introduce anything of our own into this book. Rather, we will compile, arrange, set down and demonstrate the investigation only of those things that were written, as they were enacted by Him over a long time, and as they will be [enacted] by Him (fol. 78a).
>
> ܦܘܫܩܐ ܘܦܘܪܫܐ ܐܝܟ ܚܝܠ ܢܥܒܕ. ܟܕ ܡܙܕܗܪܝܢ. ܕܠܐ ܡܕܡ ܡܢ ܢܦܫܢ ܢܥܠ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܗܢܐ. ܐܠܐ ܠܗܝܢ ܠܗܝܢ ܠܚܘܕܝܗܝܢ
> ܕܟܬܝܒܢ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܢܟܢܫ ܘܢܣܕܪ ܘܢܣܝܡ ܘܢܚܘܐ ܒܘܚܪܢܗܝܢ. ܗܢܝܢ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܢ ܒܪܘ ܐܬܥܒܕܝ: ܘܡܢܗ ܒܬܪܗ ܕܢܗܘܘܢ.

Furthermore, John illustrates his exegetical skill by providing verse-by-verse interpretations [of four Psalms which he views Messianic. Thus he interprets] sections of Psalm 2 (Book VII, fols. 61a-62b); Psalm 8 (Book VII, fols. 62b-64b); Psalm 45 (Book VII fols. 65a-71a, Book VIII fols. 71b-74a); and Psalm 110 (Book VIII fols. 74b-77b), all of which are viewed by John and many Church fathers to contain Christological themes. These parts of the *Resh Melle* will be discussed in Chapter IV.

Given the evidence for John's interest in exegesis found in the *Resh Melle*, it may also be the case that *The Book of Questions* (section 2.2.3) included exegetical material.[335]

2.3.4 A Liturgist

Apart from the hymn found in the book of *Ḥudra* which is attributed to him, John is not known to have made any contribution to the liturgy of Church of the East. This being said, one cannot rule out the possibility that John may have been the author of other hymns in the book of *Ḥudra* which are anonymous. Certain *memre* in the BL manuscript, however, clearly demonstrate John's great interest in the liturgy of the Church. The sixth *memra* in the collection (fols. 197a-202a) is a commentary on a portion of the liturgy: "On the hymn: Thee, Lord of all, we confess, and Thee, Jesus Christ, we glorify; for Thou art the Quickener of our bodies, and Thou art the Saviour of our souls."[336] The eleventh *memra* (fols. 220b-225b) is entitled, "On the hymn: Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy upon us." In these two *memre* John offers a theological interpretation of these two hymns which are part of the 'Liturgy of the Word', that is, the first part of Eucharistic liturgy of the Church of the East. To my knowledge, these two *memre* contain the most substantial interpretations of these two liturgical hymns in the East Syriac tradition. It is important to note that the portion of the liturgy explained in John's eleventh *memra* is distinct from that portion of the liturgy which is commented on by Narsai ("On the vision of Isaiah") (d. 503 A.D.). John explains that the hymn interpreted in his eleventh *memra* is associated with events in 5th century Constantinople,[337] and that in his day, it is celebrated in the four corners of the world (fol. 222b). John's emphasis on the universality of the celebration of this other 'Trisagion' may suggest that its first use in the Church of the East occurred during the patriarchate of Aba the Great (536-552 A.D.) who travelled to Edessa,

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[335] Others examples of this format are attested in the *Catalogue* of ʿAbidishoʿ in BO, III/1, such as "The Book of Questions on the Old and the New Testaments" (72) by Yoḥannan Beth Rabban (6th century), "On many Questions" (154) by Ḥnanishoʿ I (d. 700), "[The Book of] Questions" (81-84) by Ḥnana of Ḥdayyaw (d. ca. 610 A.D.), "Twenty-Two Questions on Ecclesiastical Mysteries" (105-111) by Ishoʿyahb I (d. 595).

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[336] This is the English translation as given in the 1893 English edition of *The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles Addai and Mari*, (London: 1893; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1970).

[337] Abraham Qaṭraya (6th Century A.D.), in his short *Interpretatio officiorum* (161-80), edited and compiled at the end of *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae* II, CSCO SS II 92 (by George of Arbela), ed. and trans. R. H. Connolly (Paris, 1913), explains that this hymn originated during the reign of emperor Theodosius II 408-450 A.D. For forty days, the wrath of God was causing earthquakes and terrifying all the inhabitants of the city of Constantinople. God then sent his angel to instruct a priest to enter the city and to go to the church. The priest and the congregation recited the hymn after the angel three times, and then the earthquakes came to an end. Abraham adds, however, that an additional phrase was added at the end of hymn ("Who was crucified on our behalf") by the emperor Anastasius I (491-518) "due to his sympathy with the Monophysites." Abraham notes, however, that "Constantinople, the capital of the empire, was not persuaded to amend the canon, nor was Jerusalem or the western regions, but they [all] continued to recite it the way that we do" 166-167. George of Arbela states that, according to many church fathers and ecclesiastical histories, the earthquakes occurred in the year 748 A.G. (437 A.D.) See George of Arbela, *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae* I, SS II 91 (Paris, 1911), 187-8.

Constantinople, Palestine and Egypt. At any rate, its incorporation must be earlier than the time of Ishoʿyahb I (581-595), who wrote his *memra* “The cause of Trisagion” (ܥܠܬܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܐܠܗܐ) on this hymn.[338]

2.3.5 An ascetic and mystic author

John is clearly recognized as an ascetic monk who lived most of his life in the Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol, and later on, at the Monastery of Mar Bassima. In modern scholarship, the main studies have concentrated on *Resh Melle*. However, John’s writings on the ascetic and monastic life deserve more attention.

As indicated above, the BL manuscript includes the *Book on Virginity and Holiness*, consisting of four *memre*, as well as a *memra* entitled “On Rabbaan Sabrishoʿ, the founder of the holy convent of Kmol.” Besides these five *memre*, there is a sixth *memra* which has been transmitted independently and which is entitled “A Beneficial *memra* of Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye.” Finally, there is the surviving material that belongs to John’s work *The Merchant* (Syr. ‘taggara’).

The six *memre* just mentioned are didactic and concern the ascetic and monastic life. They provide ample information regarding monasticism and the ascetic life in the Church of the East during the second half of the seventh century A.D. They include instructions, highlight monastic rituals, and remind the reader of the many rules for the regulation of the monastic life. John composed these *memre* to encourage monks to conduct their life through chastity and virtue while fulfilling their obligations of praying and fasting. John acknowledges that there are various means and ways that lead to salvation, yet affirms that monasticism is the ideal path.

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[338] See “Trattato di Ishoʿyahb d’Arzon sul Τριζαγιον” in *Rivista degli studi oriental 7* (Roma: 1916-18), 687-715.

The genre of *The Merchant* is that of mystical wisdom sayings, and it is similar to works composed by his contemporaries Simon of Ṭaybutha and Isaac of Nineveh. The eighth-century mystical and ascetic author Joseph Ḥazzaya wrote a commentary on *The Merchant*, which is clear testimony to the importance of John's work and its mystical genre.[339]

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[339] See ʿAbdishoʿ, *Catalogue,* 100-103.

Chapter 3

The Book of Resh Melle

John's *Resh Melle* consists of fifteen books which are divided into two parts. Its first part includes books I to IX, and the second part includes books X to XV. In the first part, John narrates his world history from the beginning according to the book of *Genesis* and down to the time just before the New Testament era. The second part begins with the New Testament era ("Now let us move in our discourse to the divine epiphany..."; fol. 90a) and concludes with a narration of events which are contemporary to the author. In both parts of his work, John strongly emphasizes the Divine dispensation and God's active role in Soteriological history despite human disobedience.

3.1 Title

John bar Penkaye used the title *Resh Melle* (ܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ) throughout his work. The title without any preceding conjunction appears once in fol. 101b, with the preceding preposition ܒ (*b*), ܒܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ, 4 times (fols. 100b, 134a, 154a, 155a), and with the relative particle ܕ (*d*), ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ, 4 times (fols. 36b, 123b, 134a, 155a). More often, *Resh Melle* is simply referred to as "the Book" (ܟܬܒ݂ܐ ; *kthawa*; 18 occurrences: fols. 3b, 6b, 23b, 28a, 31a, 36b, 78a, 83b, 89b, 101b, 105a, 113a, 120a, 121b, 123b, 134a, 155a [twice]) or "this Book" (ܟܬܒ݂ܐ ܗܢܐ ; *kthawa hana;* 17 occurrences: (fols. 3b, 6b, 23b, 28a, 31a, 36b, 78a, 83b, 89b, 101b, 105a, 113a, 121b, 123b, 134a, 155a [twice]). In these cases it is clear that the author assumes that his readers already know what he is referring to. The combined phrase "in this *Book of Resh Melle*" (ܒܟܬܒ݂ܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ; *bakthawa hana d-resh melle*) appears 4 times (fols. 36b, 123b, 134a, 155a). An even clearer expression of John's choice of title for his work occurs in the phrase ܒܟܬܒ݂ܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܫܡܗ ܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ("in this book which we have entitled *Resh Melle*"; fol. 101b). Excluded in this list are 11 occurrences of the title at the beginning of each book, and twice at the end of the first division of the work (fol. 89b), which may not go back to John himself, but probably to the copyist.[340] The Syriac tradition, along with modern scholarship, clearly attributes *Resh Melle* to John, an attribution supported by the author himself.

3.2 The phrase 'resh melle' and related terms in earlier texts

John would have already been familiar with the idiomatic expression that he used for his title, since it appears in many sources which John must have known. Several of the more important sources which use this expression will now be discussed.

3.2.1 *Daniel 7:1*

In the Aramaic portion of the Book of Daniel we encounter רָאשׁ מִלִּין, '*resh millin*' rendered in the Syriac Peshiṭta as ܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܘܗܝ '*resh mellaw,'* the same expression as John's ܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ '*resh melle'* but with the possessive suffix. The root of the second term is ܡܠܠ '*mallel*', which means 'to talk, speak, say'. Thus the Peshiṭta reads: ܒܫܢܬ ܚܕܐ ܕܒܠܛܫܐܨܪ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܒܒܠ: ܕܢܝܐܝܠ ܚܠܡܐ ܚܙܐ: ܘܚܙ̈ܘܝ ܪܫܗ ܕܥܠ ܡܫܟܒܗ: ܗܝܕܝܢ ܚܠܡܐ ܟܬܒ ܘܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܘܗܝ ܐܡܪ, "In the first year of Belṭshaṣar, the King of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream. And visions of his head [while] lying on his bed, he wrote the dream and spoke *its main points.*" Thus the meaning of the idiom in John appears to be the same as its meaning in this passage from Daniel in the Peshiṭta.

3.2.2 *Quhlath (Ecclesiastes) 10:13*

The phrase appears in the book of *Ecclesiastes* 10:13, where the Peshiṭta reads: ܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܝ ܦܘܡܗ ܣܟܠܘܬܐ: ܘܚܪܬܐ ܕܦܘܡܗ ܦܘܪܫܢܐ ܒܝܫܐ, "The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness;

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[340] See Appendix B for the variations in the titles across the four manuscripts used for this study.

the end of [the words of] his mouth is evil shame." The Hebrew Bible reads: תְּחִלַּת דִּבְרֵי־פִיהוּ 'the beginning of the words of his mouth'. Here the phrase has more of a literal meaning.

3.2.3 *Psalm 111:10*

The phrases *resh mellaw* or *resh melle* are not attested in the Book of *Psalms*, which does however use the word *resh* as in ܪܝܫ ܚܟܡܬܐ "the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 111:10). The expression ܪܝܫ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܕܚܠܬܗ ܕܡܪܝܐ *resh ḥekhemtha deḥelthe d-marya* can be translated "the essence of wisdom is the fear of the Lord." In the title of another work by John (*Taggara* "the Merchant") we encounter the words *d-ith be-resheh dida'tha l-durasha* ("which contains extracts of knowledge for study") (Mingana, Syr. 47, fol. 252a). Although ܪܝܫ ܚܟܡܬܐ *resh ḥekhemtha* and ܪܝܫ ܝ̈ܕܥܬܐ *resh ida'tha* represent slightly different meanings of the term *resh*, (essence vs. extract), they shed light on the meaning of John's *resh melle*, which could be rendered as either "the essence of words" or perhaps "extracts of words (or statements)."

3.2.4 *The New Testament*

The Syriac New Testament uses the term *resh mellaw* in one passage only which illustrates an important aspect of this idiomatic term. Thus, the letter to the Hebrews reads: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the *basic words* of God [ܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܘܗܝ ܕܐܠܗܐ]. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil" (5:12-14).

John explicitly says that in writing his work, he is fulfilling a promise given to his abbot Sabrisho', who must have commissioned it (fol. 36b). In the context of monastic instruction, John may have considered his work as an elementary introduction (like 'milk') for novices, a resource for new monks which contained the elementary teaching about God's salvation in the history of mankind. When ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis lists the seven works of John in his *Catalogue*, *Resh Melle* appears as the second item, immediately following a work entitled *On the Education of the Young*. Did ʿAbdishoʿ group these two works together because *both* were considered to be didactic and conceived by John for the education of new monks?

Shlemon (d. 1240 A.D.), metropolitan of Baṣrah, uses a metaphor in his *Book of the Bee* where he observes that the bee flies to distant places to visit various flowers in order to collect the necessary pollen to make its honey. Likewise, Shlemon has consulted and searched out various scriptures and books in order to compile and produce his own work. This work presents 'abstracts' and 'summaries' of knowledge which are suitable for beginners. Those who desire to seek knowledge in more depth, however, should consult the sources themselves. Likewise, *Resh Melle* presents summary knowledge for beginners; those who were not satisfied with its content would have had to consult more detailed accounts.

3.2.5 *The Syriac Version of the Hexaemeron of Basil*

Greek *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* were composed by Basil of Caesarea (330-379 A.D.), a number of whose works were more than once translated into Syriac from the fifth to the seventh centuries.[341] It is interesting to note that the term *resh mellaw* appears in the Syriac version of the *Hexaemeron,* for in the first homily we read:

> The wise men of the Greeks laboured over many matters that are found in nature, but not a single one of their arguments could be preserved among [accepted] truths or remain unshaken and unmoved. For a second wise man among them would refute the arguments of the first wise man. Now it will not be our task to refute them, for through their own discord they are able to overturn their mutual falsehoods. Yet it was possible for those who did not wish to recognise God to discern and understand through their knowledge that God is the cause of all those things which were established through his providence...

A little later in his discussion, the author introduced the phrase in question:

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[341] Brock, "Basil of Caesarea", *GEDSH*, 64.

> Lest we fall into these painful errors, the chronicler of the creation of the world put into our understanding and illuminated it and spoke thus at the beginning of his account: God is the creator of the world in the beginning, which he put [as title] on it.[342]
>
> ܘܡܛܠ ܕܚܢܢ ܒܗܠܝܢ ܛܘ̈ܥܝܐ ܕܟܐܒܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܢܦܠ. ܐܪܡܝ ܒܡܕܥܢ ܘܐܢܗܪܗ ܡܟܬܒܢܐ ܕܒܪܝܬܗ ܕܥܠܡܐ. ܘܗܟܢܐ ܐܡܪ
> ܒܪܫ ܡܠܘ̈ܗܝ. ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܒܪܘܝܗ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܒܒܪܫܝܬ.

3.2.6 *Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 A.D.)*

Theodore of Mopsuestia composed his works in Greek, and many of his works were translated into Syriac during the fifth and sixth centuries. His short *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer* has survived in Syriac. The Syriac translation of this short commentary includes four occurrences of the phrase ܒܦܣܝܩܬܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܐ (*b-pasiqatha d-melle*), which Mingana translates in several ways.[343] Although the term is different, the connotation is the same as that of '*resh melle*' when used by John.

3.2.7 *The Synod of Ishoʿyahb (585 A.D)*

Ishoʿyahb I (582-595 A.D.), the Catholicos Patriarch of the Church of the East, assembled a Synod in 585 A.D., and thirty-one canons were issued. The third canon of this synod is titled, "Concerning the benefits that came forth from the establishment of the laws and the canons in various ages of the Old [Testament] and of the New [Testament]."[344] Here *resh melle* is absent but we find the word ܪ̈ܫܢܐ *reshane*: "[God] set multiple laws for carnal Israel, in whose principles [or 'main points'] were inscribed by God's finger on the stone tablets" (ܣܡ ܢܡܘ̈ܣܐ

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[342] Basil of Caesarea, *The Syriac Version of the Hexaemeron,* ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson, CSCO 550 SS 222 (Louvain: Peeters, 1995), 2.2.

[343] The phrase ܒܦܣܝܩܬܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܐ occurs in the Syriac text on pages 124, 126, 129 and 142. This Syriac expression is translated by Mingana into English in a number of ways: "in short terms" (p. 1); "short words" (p. 3); "in short words" (p. 5); "in short words" (p. 16). See A. Mingana, *The Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer, Baptism and Eucharist*, (Cambridge: W Heffer and Sons, 1933).

[344] ܩܢܘܢܐ ܕܬܠܬܐ: ܥܠ ܥܘܕܪ̈ܢܐ ܕܢܦܩܘ ܡܢ ܣܝܡ ܢܡܘ̈ܣܐ ܘܣܝܡ ܩܢܘ̈ܢܐ ܒܕܪ ܕܪ ܒܥܬܝܩܬܐ ܘܒܚܕܬܐ ("The Synod of Ishoʿyahb [585 A.D.]", *Synodicon Orientale*, 138-139).

ܗܒܝܩ̈ܐ ܠܝܣܪܝܠ ܕܒܒܣܪ. ܗܢܘܢ ܕܪ̈ܫܝܐ ܕܒܗܘܢ ܟܬܝܒܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܒܨܒܥܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܒܠܘܚ̈ܐ ܕܟܐܦܐ).[345] The term here has the same meaning as *resh melle* used by John.

3.2.8 *The Book of Mnawatha* ("The Book of Gifts")

The Book of Gifts, ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܢܘ̈ܬܐ, *kthawa damnawatha*, was composed by Shuwḥa-l-Maran, the Metropolitan of Karkha d-Slokh (modern Kirkuk) in the early 7th century A.D., and in it the author employs the phrase *resh mellaw* ܪܫ ܡܠܘ̈ܗܝ. His use of this term corresponds to its role in the third canon of the Synod of Ishoʿyahb I (585 A.D.) and in the letter to the Hebrews, discussed above: "At the end of his first labour they were given to him [=Moses] the tables on which were the first writings of the summary of God's words" (.. ܒܫܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܡܠܗ ܩܕܡܝ ܡܬܝܗܒܐ ܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ ܠܘܚ̈ܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܟܬܝ̈ܒܢ ܗܘ̈ܝ ܒܗܝܢ ܟܬܝܒ̈ܬܐ ܩܕܡܝ̈ܬܐ ܕܪܫ ܡܠܘ̈ܗܝ ܕܐܠܗܐ:).[346]

We may safely conclude, therefore, that John, a learned monk, versed in the Scriptures and in the extensive Syriac literature of the Church of the East, must have been familiar with the phrase *resh melle* and its related terms in a number of sources (biblical, patristic, and contemporary) which were extant at his time, only some of which we have surveyed above.

Nonetheless, *The Book of Gifts* by Shuwḥa-l-Maran may well have been the direct source of John's title, for the following reasons.

Firstly, the memory of Shuwḥa-l-Maran (an important figure who died ca. 620 A.D., possibly as a martyr), who was highly praised by Ishoʿdnaḥ of Baṣrah in his *Book of Chastity,*[347] may still have been very fresh in the mind of John. In his *Catalogue of Authors*, ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis listed the works of John bar Penkaye immediately after those of Shuwḥa-l-Maran.[348] If we can assume that the *Book of Gifts* was in circulation very soon after the death of its author (which has a certain plausibility given the stature of its author and its theme), it would certainly have been available to John, who wrote more than half a century later.

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[345] Ibid.

[346] Shuḥalmaran, *The Book of Gifts*, ed. and trans. David J. Lane (Louvain: CORPUS, 2004), 8.4. Rabbinic tradition that there are 613 commandments was first recorded in the Talmud (Makkot 23b) by Rabbi Simlai, who stated: "Six hundred and thirteen commandments were given to Moses; three hundred and sixty-five negative commandments, corresponding to the number of the days in the solar year, and two hundred and forty eight positive commandments, corresponding to the numbers of parts of the human body." The Ten Commandments would have been considered the essential core of this body of law. See Ronald H. Isaacs, *Mitzvot: A Sourcebook for the 613 Commandments*, (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 1-2.

[347] Ishoʿdnaḥ, *Le Livre de la chasteté,* no. 58.

Secondly, the works of John and Shuwḥa-l-Maran share similar expressions. For example, the full title of John's work is ܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܥܠܡܐ ܙܒܢܝܐ "The Book of *Resh Melle*, a history of the temporal world." In *The Book of Gifts* we read:

> At the end of his first labour there were given him [=Moses] the tables on which were the first writings of the summary of God's words. (…) Adam, by his own will, transgressed the command, and was not worthy to remain in his first glory. The first breaking, then, of these tablets split us apart, a swift destruction of the world of time.[349]
>
> .. ܒܫܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܡܠܗ ܕܗܘ̣ ܩܕܡܝܐ ܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܗ: ܠܘ̈ܚܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܟܬܝ̈ܒܢ ܗܘ̈ܝ ܒܗܘܢ ܟܬܝ̈ܒܬܐ ܩܕ̈ܡܝܬܐ ܕܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܘܗܝ
> ܕܐܠܗܐ: (...) ܐܝܟ ܐܕܡ ܕܒܨܒܝܢܗ ܥܒܪ ܦܘܩܕܢܐ: ܘܥܠ ܗܕܐ ܠܐ ܐܫܬܘܝ، ܕܢܟܬܪ ܒܫܘܒܚܗ ܩܕܡܝܐ. ܬܒܪܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ
> ܕܠܘ̈ܚܐ ܗܢܝܢ ܦܠܓܘ ܠܢ: ܡܫܬܪܝܢܘܬܗ ܩܠܝܠܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܙܒܢܝܐ.

Shuwḥa-l-Maran uses the word *kthiwatha* (ܟܬܝ̈ܒܬܐ) "inscribed letters" or "written words," reminding us of the first word in John's title *kthawa* (ܟܬܒܐ) *"Book."* Moreover, he uses the word *qadmayatha* (ܩܕ̈ܡܝܬܐ) "first, early, ancient" to modify the noun *kthiwatha*, hence ܟܬܝ̈ܒܬܐ ܩܕ̈ܡܝܬܐ, 'the first letters' or 'the earlier writings', which could refer to historical accounts. John often uses the term *tashʿitha* (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) "history, account", which may overlap in meaning with *kthiwatha qadmayatha*. In addition, Shuwḥa-l-Maran uses the compound idiomatic term *resh mellaw* (ܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܘܗܝ) "the summary of his [i.e. God's] words," while John uses the same phrase without the pronominal suffix (*resh melle*, ܪܝܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ), and in both cases the meaning is the same.

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[348] ʿAbdishoʿ, *Catalogue, BO,* III/1, 189.

[349] Shuḥalmaran, *The Book of Gifts*, Part 1: viii, 4.

Lastly, Shuwḥa-l-Maran uses the compound expression *ʿalma dzawna* (ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ) "the temporal world" which also occurs in John's title with the same meaning.

3.3 Meaning of 'resh melle' for John

The phrase *resh melle* is a relatively rare Syriac idiom whose translation has proven to be challenging for scholars. In his *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, Mingana translates the title as "Beginning of Words."[350] On the surface, this translation of Mingana resembles the usage of a similar phrase by Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286 A.D.). In one of his poetic hymns, he uses the phrase *resha d-meltha* ܪܫܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ to mean 'the beginning of the discourse'.[351] It is important to point out, however, that John does not use any such phrase to refer to the actual beginning of his work. Since Mingana must have been well aware of this, his use of the term 'beginning' to translate John's title must be understood in a non-literal way. Thus, Mingana's translation of the title can be understood as meaning something like 'the beginning of the investigation', i.e., an introduction to the basic concepts of a subject. John could well have used the phrase *Resh[a] [d]Melle,* ܪܫܐ ܕܡ̈ܠܐ, but, as outlined above, he preferred the construct state: *Resh Melle,* ܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ. On the other hand, Hoyland considers Baumstark's German term "Hauptredepunkte" to be very apt, and translates *Kthawa d-Resh Melle* as the "Book of Salient Points."[352] More recently, Greisiger has followed Hoyland's lead in translating John's title as "The Book of main points", while Muriel Debié renders it as “The Book of the First Principles [of the History of the Temporal World].” Because of the difficulty of translating this uncommon title, Syriac scholars generally refer to John’s work as *The Book of Resh Melle*, or simply *Resh Melle*.[353]

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[350] A. Mingana, *CMCM*, vol. I, (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1933), 395.

[351] Bar Hebraeus wrote: "At the beginning of our discourse, it is proper for us to glorify the Father, who is the first cause; and we should offer a doxology to the worshipped Son, who is not separate from the first [cause] [i.e. who is generated from the Father]" (ܒܪܫܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ: ܠܪܫܐ ܐܒܐ: ܦܐܐ ܐܒܐ ܕܢܫܒܚ. ܘܠܒܪܐ ܡܣܓܕܐ: ܠܐ ܕܠܐ ܪܫܐ: ܬܘܕܝ، ܢܘܒܠ). The unpublished manuscript in which this passage is found contains material added to the original poem by East Syrian authors over many centuries, the last dating from the 1930s. The entire work, which is given the title "Rhymed Memre" (ܡܐܡܪ̈ܐ ܗܘ ܠܚܢ̈ܐ), contains 314 stanzas. Each stanza contains the original couplet by Bar Hebraeus plus six other couplets, each by a different author. According to Alber Aboona in his *Aramaic [Syriac] Literature* (Beirut: Dar al-Mashreq, 2nd ed. 1996), 515, the manuscript (no. 918) is kept at the library of the Chaldean monastery in Baghdad.

[352] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 195.

John himself makes clear what he means by his work’s title. Near the end of Book X, we read the following:

> Behold, I have demonstrated to you how relief came for all [our] sorrows through Jesus Christ our Lord, according to the goal which we set for ourselves throughout [our] history of this temporal world (namely, what God enacted through his mercy towards humanity, and what they [in turn] did in their ingratitude, such it seems to us), and through the [divine] assistance that was granted to us we made [it] known to you in brief [ܒܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ]. Thus, we were able to keep the length of our account within a [certain] limit and boundary (fol. 100b).

A similar idea is found near the beginning of the work:

> But what is the purpose of [saying] these things, when their worth is often revealed to distinguished ones. We have sufficiently demonstrated [these things] in that book which we have already composed against [heretical] doctrines. But now we have assigned a different goal for ourselves in this book, and it is not necessary to search after lengthy discourse [ܡ̈ܠܐ ܐܪ̈ܝܟܬܐ]. Rather, we only need to demonstrate those things that are appropriate to the account, to make known all the things that God has done for the human race, and the things that humans have done in every generation (fol. 6b).

It is clear that the title of John’s work reflects his goal of avoiding “lengthy discourse.” This is again confirmed by John when he assures Sabrishoʿ that “we have listed the words of truth in brief” (ܒܟܘܪ̈ܝܬܐ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܫܪ̈ܪܐ ܪܫܡܢ) (fol. 58a). Likewise, in Book XI, John alerts the reader that he is going to limit his discussion of a particular topic in keeping with his overall purpose:

> What then? It is appropriate for us to briefly [ܒܦܣܝ̈ܩܬܐ] deal with the accounts [ܡ̈ܠܐ] of the passion [of Christ]. We will recall only those among them which agree with the goal that we have set ourselves in this Book of Resh Melle [ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ] (fols. 105a-b).

The closing lines of Book VII express a similar idea:

> Let it be known, my beloved one, that if I was not afraid of weak minds (since I know that they easily deviate towards envy and murmuring), ten books would not be enough for me to contain the mystery concerning our faith. Be persuaded, therefore, that, without delay, it pleases me to fix the vision of my mind on [the rest of] this account. For I certainly do not think that there is anything that matches or compares with this [divine] gift. But since limitation and measure is appropriate for everything, here we bring an end also to this *memra*, and lift up praise to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen (fol. 71a).

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[353] Brock, “North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century”, 51-75.

The passages above clearly demonstrate John's reason for selecting the title of his work.

3.4 Time of composition

John provides no date for his composition of *Resh Melle*. No manuscript claims that it was directly copied from its prototype, and no colophon provides the date of its composition. If John's autograph had managed to survive, this information may have been provided in a preface (now lost?)[354] or in a colophon. Most Syriac authors give the year of composition at the end of their work in a colophon. Although the surviving copies of John's work lack this information, the last book of his work refers to contemporary events and to major historical figures whose dates are well established. Such information allows us to fix a probable date for John's composition of his work.

In book XV of *Resh Melle*, John describes the reign of Muʿawiya (661-680 A.D.) as a time of peace, justice, and tranquility which "we have not heard of from our fathers or grandfathers" (fols. 146a-b). But it is certain that John lived after his rule, since he explains that Muʿawiya was succeeded by his son Yazid (680-683 A.D.), who "was unwise and did not follow the ways of his father" and whom "God quickly removed" (fols. 149a-b). The reference to these two Umayyad rulers shows us that John lived after their reign. Book XV also discusses the rising dispute between "the eastern [Arabs]" (ܡܕ̈ܢܚܝܐ) and "the western [Arabs]" (ܡܥ̈ܪܒܝܐ) over the control of Nisibis, which eventually led to war between the two parties. Ibn Ziyad, who represented the western faction, promised John, the Metropolitan of Nisibis, that if he would accept him and support him, he would depose Ḥnanishoʿ (685-698 A.D.), the patriarch of the Church of the East, and would set him in his place. But John explains that al-Mukhtar, the leader of the easterners

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[354] The lack of a preface for *Resh Melle* is unusual; by the seventh century, most works produced by Syriac authors included one. See our (section 3.6) below for further discussion of this feature of the text.

(ʿ*Aqulaye* or people of Kufa), defeated the westerners[355] (who were trying to establish the Marwanid rule in Iraq). This defeat, he tells us, was the result of a battle on the river Khazir (near Mosul) in 67 A.H. (=686 A.D.).[356] He then reports that Yoḥannan (John, the Metropolitan of Nisibis, who had been ready to seize the patriarchate, fled in embarrassment (fol. 150a). This event is also reported by the chronicler Eliyya bar Shennaya, who does not refer to *Resh Melle*; in his chronicle *Makhtwanutha dzawne*, he quotes from the lost Ecclesiastical History of Ishoʿdnaḥ, the Metropolitan of Baṣrah who wrote: "John, the Metropolitan of Nisibis, approached ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwan [685-705] and asked to be the catholicos instead of Ḥnanishoʿ." His desire was fulfilled when Ḥnanishoʿ was deposed in 692 A.D. and John was illegitimately installed as patriarch for one year and ten months (692-693 A.D.).[357] Since *Resh Melle* does not mention this fact, however, it is clear that it was composed before this time.

At the end of book XV (fol. 151a) John mentions the year "67 of the reign of the *Ṭayyaye*-Arabs" [A.H.] which corresponds to the year 686/7 A.D.[358] In fact, he repeats the reference to the year 67 A.H. in the very next line. The bloody battle that took place in this year and its catastrophic consequences must have had a great impact on John, for he interprets these events in light of biblical passages with an apocalyptic tone. There are good indications that John is writing soon after this battle. He tells the reader quite clearly that there have been a series of trials that have occurred after the battle. The first of these is a plague:

> In the year 67 of the rule of the Arabs, after all of these signs and terrifying events which we have demonstrated above, and after those wars and conflicts through which [God] was calling and awakening

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[355] John uses *maʿerwaye* (ܡܥܪ̈ܒܝܐ; 'westerners') to denote Arabs who lived west of the Euphrates river. The term is used eight times by John in *Resh Melle*. It appears in *folios* 146a; (five times); 149b; and 150a (twice). See our discussion of John's use of the terms 'easterners' and 'westerners' to refer to both Syrians and Arabs in Chapter II.

[356] John states that this battle took place at the Ḥazir river (ܚܙܝܪ) (see fol. 145a). Kennedy confirms that this battle took place at river Khazir, near Mosul in August 686. See his work, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphate*, 94.

[357] Eliyya bar Shennaya, *Opus Chronologicum*, [I], *Opus Chronologicum* [I], ed. E.W. Brooks, CSCO 63* SS 21 (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1910 [2nd ed. Louvain, 1954]), Syr. 55.

[358] Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century", 56.

> us (though we did not heed him), in this year 67, a deadly plague, like none before it, began to afflict us (fol. 151a).
>
> ܘܒܫܢܬ ܫܬܝܢ ܘܫܒܥ ܠܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܕܛܝ̈ܝܐ: ܒܬܪ ܗܠܝܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܐܬ̈ܘܬܐ ܘܡܘܙܗܪ̈ܐ ܕܫܕܪ ܒܢ ܠܟܠ. ܘܒܫܢܬ ܗܕܐ ܡܘܬܢܐ ܘܬܫܬܘܫܬ̈ܐ: ܕܒܗܘܢ ܠܫܘܒܩܬܐ ܡܢܐ ܘܡܚܣܪ ܗ̄ܘܐ ܠܝ ܘܠܐ ܬܒܢ؛ ܒܗ ܒܫܢܬ ܫܬܝܢ ܘܫܒܥ: ܫܪܝ ܒܢ ܗ݁ܘ ܡܘܬܢܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܕܐܟܘܬܗ ܠܐ ܗܘ̣ܐ.

John refers to this plague as the "first generation" of God's chastisement: "This was the first generation, that is to say, this was the beginning of the pangs" (ܗܢܐ ܗ̄ܘܐ ܕܪܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ. ܗܢܘ ܕܝܢ ܗܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܪܫܗܘܢ ܕܚܒ̈ܠܐ ; fol. 152a). He then refers to the famine that immediately followed the plague as the "second trial" (ܗܠܝܢ ܬܘܒ ܕܐܢܣܝܘܢܐ ܕܬܪܝܢ ; fol. 152b).[359] The sequence is concluded as John refers to the return of plague once again:

> After these things, the plague returned once again and gleaned. It herded [people] head by head. What famine left, plague consumed, and what plague left, the sword finished off (fol. 153a).
>
> ܘܗܦܟ ܬܘܒ ܡܘܬܢܐ ܠܡܓܒܪܘ ܒܬܪܗܘܢ. ܘܪܥܐ ܗ̄ܘܐ ܪܫܐ ܪܫܐ. ܘܡܕܡ ܕܐܘܬܪ ܟܦܢܐ: ܠܥܣܗ ܡܘܬܢܐ. ܘܡܕܡ ܕܐܘܬܪ ܡܘܬܢܐ ܓܡܪܬܗ ܚܪܒܐ.

After describing the stages of God's punishment, John addresses his superior Sabrishoʿ directly, and indicates that these terrible events are continuing in the present. It is in these closing lines (beginning on fol. 153a) that the word "today" is repeated six times in close succession, a good indication that John is writing during the events in question.

Interestingly, if we turn the letters of the expression ܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ (*kthawa d-Resh Melle*) into numbers (Syriac letters have numerical values), the sum would be as follows: ܟܬܒܐ: 20 + 400 + 2 + 1 / ܕܪܫ: 4 + 200 + 300 / ܡ̈ܠܐ: 40 + 30 + 1 = 998. It turns out that the year 998 corresponds to 68 A.H. (687 A.D.), and thus agrees quite well with the internal evidence for the date of composition just reviewed. That being said, John never uses the Seleucid dating system in his work, despite its general use among Syriac authors. Rather, in the few places where he gives specific dates, his usual practice is to use regnal years.

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[359] Eliyya bar Shennaya notes that in the year 68 A.H., which corresponds to 998 A.G. (687 A.D.), "there was a great famine and people perished [in great] numbers;" *Opus Chronologicum* [I], Syr. 149-150.

3.5 Purpose of Writing

As with any work, *Resh Melle* must have been composed with a goal in mind, but, as mentioned in the previous section, none of the surviving manuscripts contains a preface which may have provided this information. Normally, a preface would contain a concise summary of the book's contents, but it might also contain a statement of purpose or an acknowledgement of a person on whose behalf the work was undertaken. Many Syriac authors who flourished during the seventh century wrote introductions to their works. For example, Babai the Great (553-628) in his theological work entitled *The Book of Union,* explains his intention: his work was a response to his spiritual fathers, brothers and ascetics of the covenant of Mar Abraham of the Izla mountain. It was specifically written at the request of Mar Ḥabbiwa, the presbyter from Beth-Nuhadra in northern Mesopotamia, and Mar Narsai, the deacon from Kashkar, and a relative of Mar Abraham, the spiritual father and founder of the Covenant.[360] Likewise, Dadishoʿ Qaṭaraya of the Monastery of Rab-kennare in Emirate of Qaṭar wrote *A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* with a preface in which he declares that his work was in response to a request made by the monks Mar Aḥuw and Mar Abkush respectfully.[361]

It is quite possible that John wrote such a preface which may then have dropped out during the transmission of *Resh Melle*, for in book IV (fol. 34a) he informs his readers that his work was in response to a request made by his abbot Sabrishoʿ. In fact, Sabrishoʿ's name appears nine times[362] with such honorific titles as "respected brother" (fol. 34a), "our brother, honoured above all" (fol. 36b), and "beloved brother [who is] dear to my soul" (fol. 101b). These titles highlight the distinguished place that Sabrishoʿ had in John's mind, but also strongly suggest that the composition of *Resh Melle* was intended to fulfil a promise made by John to Sabrishoʿ (fol. 36b).

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[360] Babai the Great, *Liber de Unione*, ed. and trans. A. Vaschalde, CSCO 79 SS 34 (Paris: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1915), 1-6.

[361] This is also witnessed in West-Syrian tradition such in the works of Pseudo Joshua the Stylite and the chronicler of Zuqnin as they added a preface to their chronicles consisting of a letter to their respective monasteries, which had requested the works in question.

[362] The name Sabrishoʿ appears in *RM*, fols. 34a, 36b, 100b, 101b, 115a, 119b, 127a, 153a, and 155a.

In fact, we have already identified John's purpose of writing in our discussion of the meaning of the title given above. John says that his work is intended "to make known all the things that God has done for the human race, and the things that humans have done in every generation" (ܘܢܘܕܥ ܒܟܠܗܝܢ: ܐܝܠܝܢ ܥܒܕ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܘܬ ܓܢܣܐ ܕܒܢܝ̈ ܐܢܫܐ: ܘܐܝܠܝܢ ܥܒܕܘ ܗܢܘܢ ܒܟܠ ܕܪ ܘܕܪ) (fol. 6b). At the most basic level, John's purpose is pedagogical: he is writing a theological history through which his readers will better understand that God is in control of history, and thus be encouraged in the midst of their current crisis. As we had occasion to note in the previous section, John thought that the suffering of his community was a form of punishment for their sins. The main purpose of his work was to remind his audience of God's mercy and salvation. To achieve this purpose, John works with a number of different genres (e.g. historiography, apologetic, exegesis, etc.) which are explored in following chapter.

3.6 The Missing Preface

As discussed in the previous section, the extant manuscripts of John's *Resh Melle* include no preface. According to Eva Riad[363], a missing preface can be attributed to a variety of factors. An author may simply choose not to include a preface, but only a few words to explain his purpose of writing or a dedication, after which the subject of the work is engaged directly. Alternatively, a later copyist may abbreviate or omit a long preface. Moreover, in cases where the first chapter contains information about the work itself, the author may have not seen any need for a preface. Likewise, the author's purpose of writing may be expressed throughout his work. Riad also points out that there is a difference between a preface, in which "the author communicates with the reader outside the work itself", and a mere introduction which is part of a long text in which the main subject is not yet been treated by the author. The preface, therefore, includes a description of the author's person, his reader(s) or addressee(s), and conveys something about the work and its theme(s).[364]

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[363] See Eva Riad, *Studies in the Syriac Preface*, (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1988).

Let us now consider John's *Resh Melle* with these scenarios in mind. Throughout the work, John makes a number of references to his addressee Sabrishoʿ, at times addressing him directly. In other places John addresses his readers in general. In these contexts, the goal and intention of John's writing is often clearly indicated. Given this fact, it may have been the case that John never intended the work to have a preface.

On the other hand, there are reasons to suspect that a preface may have existed for a larger collection of which *Resh Melle* was a part. In the BL manuscript, *Resh Melle* ends in folio 155b without a long colophon but only ten words: "By the help of our Lord, this work of Yoḥannan bar Penkaye is completed" (ܫܠܡ ܠܡܟܬܒ݂ ܟܬ݂ܒ݂ܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܡܪ݁ܝ, ܝܘܚܢ ܒܪ ܦܢܟ̈ܝܐ ܒܡܥܘܕܪܢܘܬܗ ܕܡܪܢ.). Immediately following this short colophon the BL manuscript continues with another fourteen *memre* attributed to John. Based on the compilation in the BL manuscript, our argument is as follows.

First, in the four manuscripts of *Resh Melle* which we have consulted for our critical edition, after the title of the work, the text begins immediately with the word "again" (*tuw* ; ܬܘܒ݂), which is very odd and rare for the opening sentence of a work. We strongly suspect that this is the case with other manuscripts of *Resh Melle*. The term *tuw* strongly suggests that originally, there was another text or texts preceding the *Resh Melle* itself.

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[364] See Riad, *Studies in the Syriac Preface*, 15.

Second, throughout *Resh Melle* John often uses the expression “a while ago” or “already” (*men kaddu* ; ܡܢ ܟܕܘ). This expression is sometimes used to refer to previous books of *Resh Melle* itself. For example, in book III, John uses the term to refer to books I and II of *Resh Melle*:

> It is proper that I reveal here the aim of this book. In the previous two books that we composed (ܡܢ ܟܕܘ ܐܡܪܢܢ)... (fol. 19a).

In book IX, John indicates a shift between what he had said in previous *memre* and the second part of his work, in which he begins to narrate the events of the New Testament and ecclesiastical history:

> I think that what we have said already (ܕܡܢ ܟܕܘ ܐܡܪܢܢ) concerning these things is enough. We are making an approach toward the things which belong to us in the new [covenant] (fol. 81b).

Likewise, in book XI, John states that

> [i]n the preceeding *memra*, which we completed some time ago (ܕܡܢ ܟܕܘ ܫܠܡܢܢ), we explained the multitude of errors which humanity was holding onto without being persuaded of the truth (fol. 100b).

John also uses the expression *men kaddu* in book I to remind the reader about a separate work which the author had written earlier:

> We have sufficiently demonstrated [these things] in that book which ‘we have already composed’ (ܡܢ ܟܕܘ ܥܒܕܢܢ) against [false] teachings (fol. 6b).

In book XV, John uses the phrase to refer to a time which is more than a century earlier than the events that he is discussing:

> Again [the bishops at the Council of Constantinople II, 553 A.D.] decreed and established under anathema all the skilled fathers who departed from the world earlier in time (ܕܡܢ ܟܕܘ ܦܛܪܘ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ), I am saying Diodore and Theodore and the rest distinguished in their likeness (fol. 143a).

He also uses the term to refer to a much shorter period of time, a mere seven years before his composition of *Resh Melle* in 687 A.D.

> Since Mar Giwargis [d. 680], the Patriarch of East of the Church of Christ, had already departed towards the blessed life (ܕܡܢ ܟܕܘ ܫܢܝ ܠܗ ܠܘܬ ܚܝ̈ܐ ܛܘܒܬܢܐ)... (fols. 149b-150a).

Clearly, John uses the phrase *men kaddu* to refer to events or an activity which took place at some time in the past, whether a short or a long time ago. These events may be historical or may be his own compositional activity. We may speculate that John's original compilation, *Resh Melle* may have immediately followed another of his works, perhaps *Against Sects*. Since *Resh Melle* was commissioned by Sabrishoʿ, it may have been that this earlier work was produced in the same way. In this scenario, a preface, if it existed, would have been placed before the (now missing) first work. This would also explain the unusual occurrence of the term *tuw* at the beginning of *Resh Melle*. It would also explain why the addressee Sabrishoʿ is first named in Book IV (fol. 34a), rather than at the beginning of Book I. If the manuscript containing another work before *Resh Melle* was damaged, a later copyist may have simply omitted the damaged work and copied only the *Resh Melle*, which had survived complete.

It is also important to note that, at the end of *Resh Melle* (see fols. 154a-b), the author summarizes the content of the work as a whole, explains his purpose of writing once again, and directs his comments to Sabrishoʿ, the intended recipient of the work. He reminds Sabrishoʿ that, due the wide historical scope of the work (the saving actions of God from creation to the present day), he has only been able to include "main points" (*resh melle*); many details had to be excluded. Some of the functions of a preface seem to be operative here.

3.7 Sources

John acknowledges that *Resh Melle* is based on various sources. In the second book of *Resh Melle,* John speaks of how a medicine or a perfume is prepared and made through a labour-intensive process of collecting many herbs and scents. He states that the power of medicine or perfume derives from the substance of the ingredients that are collected. He speaks about his own compilation of sources in a similar way: "We desire that this account of ours would gain strength from [various] accounts that we have compiled (ܟܢܫܢ) through hard labour from [various] books (ܡܢ ܟܬܒ̈ܐ) and from nature (ܘܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ). Thus, as they are compiled and set before the reader, he will [gain] considerable assistance [from them]" [fol. 23b; other examples of 'nature' = natural order: 40b, 46a, 92a, 95b, 99b]. Here John, like many other Church Fathers, distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge: one gained from 'books' (the Scriptures and books based on them), and the other gained from 'nature'. In another passage, John introduces a very different classification system:

> Hence, you will learn clearly the grace of God and His care for the lives of humans, which is full of mercy. To confirm what we have said, we now include scriptural witnesses, as much as we are able. For we could not understand these things except through the Holy Scriptures or through the historical learning of our [Church] Fathers or through personal experience (fol. 38b).

The version of the Holy Scriptures consulted by John is known as the 'Peshiṭta' (lit. 'the plain'), and was the authorized biblical text of the Church of the East. In *Resh Melle*, John provides a full list of the canonical books of the Peshiṭta Old Testament in his day (i.e. the late seventh century):

> For we have the five books of the Torah, Joshua, the Book of Judges, Samuel, the Psalms of David, The Proverbs of Solomon, Qohelet, the Song of Songs , the Wisdom of Ben Sira, Job, the Book of Kings, Isaiah the Prophet, the Twelve [minor prophets], Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra, Baruch, Judith, Ruth, Esther, and the three Books of the Maccabees (fol. 47a).

John is confident that these books are canonical, but also acknowledges the possibility that there may be others as well: "I have seen all these books [translated] into the Syriac language, and whether there are other [books] or not, I do not know! With the help that will be given to me from our Lord, I wish to speak briefly instead of at length concerning these [books]." Here John indicates his intent to limit his discussion to canonical biblical sources, avoiding those works which have not been translated into Syriac from Greek. This implies that the canon of the Peshiṭta was not closed, an observation which is confirmed when we compare John's list with the longer one provided by ʿAbdishoʿ in his *Catalogue*.

John also believes that the books which constitute the Old Testament were originally longer:

> Now it is clear that these books [of the Old Testament] are incomplete compared to their original composition. During the destruction of Jerusalem many were burned. Moreover, since the Jews were negligently holding the [books of the] prophets at that time, the Laws and Scriptures were carelessly scattered. They neglected the Maker of Law, God, the Lord of all, and in every age replaced Him with idols of every kind. [Therefore,] what obligation did they have to [follow] his laws? Behold! When Josiah found a scroll of the Law in the temple, and read and understood its contents, it seemed to him that he was hearing something new[365] (fol. 47a).

Regarding the books which constitute the New Testament Syriac Peshiṭta, John is silent. On the other hand, he does transmit an early Christian tradition about how and why the four gospels alone were included in the New Testament.

John clearly identifies only two non-biblical sources in *Resh Melle*. He makes one reference to "the Blessed Interpreter" (ܠܛܘܒܢܐ ܡܦܫܩܢܐ) (fol. 10a), by which he clearly means Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 A.D.).[366] Baumstark argued that John was making use of a summary of Theodore's exegesis, probably by Paul of Nisibis.[367] As we shall see below, however, an unpublished *memra* by John reveals that he drew on a wide variety of sources. He also twice names Josephus Flavius as a source in his discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem ("from the history being written by Josephus [Flavius] concerning the destruction of Jerusalem" (ܡܢ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܡܟܬܒܐ ܠܝܘܣܝܦܘܣ: ܥܠ ܚܘܪܒܗ ܕܐܘܪܫܠܡ) (fols. 121b; see also 122a).[368] A possible third source is reflected in John's statement that "Mar Ḥnanishoʿ the Interpreter was ordained for the See of the Patriarchate" (ܘܐܬܬܣܝܡ ܥܠ ܟܘܪܣܝܐ ܕܦܛܪܝܪܟܘܬܐ ܡܪܝ، ܚܢܢܝܫܘܥ ܡܦܫܩܢܐ) (fol. 150a). John is the earliest author to call Ḥnanishoʿ (who is his contemporary) "the Interpreter", a title that he possessed before his election[369] and deposition by the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik.[370] Thus, although Ḥnanishoʿ is not named as a source, John must have known his exegetical works.

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[365] See 2 Kings 22:1-23:3.

[366] See footnote 506 for an example of John's dependence on Theodore. It would require a separate study to fully trace Theodore's influence on John's works.

[367] See Baumstark, "Eine syrishe Weltgeschichte des siebten Jahrh.s", 279-280.

[368] A Syriac version of Book VI of Josephus' *Jewish War* (On the Destruction of Jerusalem) already existed in the 5th or 6th century. See H. Leeming, and K. Leeming, eds. *Josephus' Jewish War and its Slavonic Version*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 26-7.

Two other unnamed sources are discussed by Baumstark.[371] The most important are from Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340): the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Chronicle*, quoted from Syriac translations, either directly or from quotations in other works. John's list of the Israelite, Assyrian-Babylonian, Seleucid, and Roman kings must have come from Eusebius. Baumstark also argues that John's mythological teaching in book IX derives from a lost apologetic text, but he does not think that the exact source can be identified.[372]

We know from John himself that he was familiar with a wide range of patristic sources, as shown in one of the *memre* in a collection included with the *Resh Melle* in BL *OR* 9385. It is entitled, "On Faith and concerning all our Orthodox Fathers who worked and prospered through it" (fols. 236-244b). It is a twelve-syllable metric *memra* which begins with: "The great Sun of righteousness was manifested in the creation; He dissipated darkness from the earth and filled it with His light." The *memra* speaks of the mystery of Incarnation, the divine nature of Jesus' teaching which was transmitted to Peter and to the apostles, and Paul and his disciples and the early Church Fathers. Important for the present study, John includes many well-known Latin and Greek Church Fathers (Roman, Cappadocian, and Antiochean) in addition to Athanasius of Egypt. He also lists Syrian Fathers, including Aphrahaṭ, Ephrem, Abraham of Kanduqe,

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[369] See Mari, *The Book of Majdal*, 63.
[370] On Ḥnanishoʿ, see *GEDSH*, 194-5.
[371] See Baumstark, "Eine syrishe Weltgeschichte des siebten Jahrh.s", 273-280. According to Jansma, Baumstark was the first modern scholar to analyze the contents of *Resh Melle*.
[372] Baumstark argues that John probably consulted Syriac versions of the following sources: *The Apology of Aristides* (chs. 9-12), *The First Apology* of Justin (ch. 54), Tatian's *Oration Against the Greeks* (chs. 8-10; 21; 32), *The Apology* of Athenagoras (chs. 17-22; 28-30), *Oration Against the Greeks* by a certain Ambrose (ch. 1-3), *An Oration of Meliton the Philosopher*. In 1889 a complete Syriac version of the *Apology* of Aristides was discovered on Mt. Sinai and it was edited and translated into English by J. R. Harris (1891). See *The Apology of Aristides*, (Cambridge: 1893).

Yoḥannan, Narsai, Michael, and finally Babai.[373] John was aware of their works for he states: “These are the workers of the field of Christ the King, who established them like lamps inside the Church... [T]heir doctrine is set as a goal before our pupils so that we may consider it and raise its concept to our minds” (fol. 243b). Since John says that he is drawing in part on the learning of Church Fathers in writing *Resh Melle*, we may safely assume that John consulted some if not all of the writers mentioned above.

In his *memra,* some authors are described in a few verses, while others receive greater attention. Immediately following references to the twelve disciples (of whom only Peter and John the Evangelist are mentioned), the seventy-two apostles, and Paul, Timothy and Titus, the following list of authors is given by John: Clement (c. 96); Ignatius (c. 35-c. 107); Dionysis (Paul’s disciple); Sixtus (d. 258); Athanasius (c. 296-373); Antony (251?-356); John Chrysostom (347-407); Basil the Great (330-379); Gregory of Nyssa (330-395); Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389); Diodore of Tarsus (died c. 390); Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428);[374] Nestorius (died c. 451) (fols. 240a-242b). Up to this point, the list includes many early prominent bishops, whether from Rome, Antioch or Cappadocia. The list continues with the following names: Aphrahaṭ (early 4th century); Evagrius Ponticus (346-399); Palladius (365-425); Theodoret (393-466); John of Apamea (5th century); Ammonius[375] (175-242); Macarius (300-390); Macarius the Great (4th – 5th century) (fols. 242b-243a). This section of the list is dominated by ascetic authors, both Greek and Syrian. The remainder of John's list consists of well-known East-Syrian authors, beginning with Ephrem (claimed by both East and West Syrian authors) and ending with Babai (fols. 243a-243b): Ephrem (306-373); Abraham of Kandoqe[376] and Yoḥannan;[377] Narsai (399-503); Michael Badoqa (6th century); Babai the Great (d. 628).

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[373] A similar list appears in the *Ḥudra*: “To the end, the lives of [these] diligent fathers [were filled] with the hard labour of teaching: Ephrem, Narsai, Mar Abraham, Mar Yoḥannan, and Mar Mikha’el, [all of them] teachers who interpreted and explained the spiritual scriptures according to the meaning and significance that is within them. They established schools in the churches in the four corners of the world. Let their prayer be our shelter and let it give strength to our faculties, so that we may meditate through the strength of their books and find benefit in them appropriate for our souls” (vol. II, 210) ܒܚܬܠܐ ܥܣܩܐ ܕܡܠܦܢܘܬܐ ܫܠܡܘ ܚܝܝ̈ܗܘܢ ܕܐܒܗ̈ܬܐ ܚܦܝ̈ܛܐ. ܐܦܪܝܡ ܘܢܪܣܝ ܘܡܪܝ، ܐܒܪܗܡ ܘܡܪܝ، ܝܘܚܢܢ ܘܡܪܝ، ܡܝܟܐܝܠ ܡܠܦ̈ܢܐ. ܕܦܫܩܘ ܘܦܪܫܘ ܟܬ̈ܒܐ، ܪ̈ܘܚܢܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܪ̈ܥܝܢܐ ܘܣܘܟܠܐ ܕܒܗܘܢ. ܘܣܝ̣ܡܘ ܒܗ̇ ܒܥܕ̈ܬܐ ܒܡܕܪ̈ܫܐ ܒܐܪ̈ܒܥܦܢܝܢ ܕܒܪܝܬܐ. ܨܠܘܬܗܘܢ ܬܗܘܐ ܠܢ ܛܘܠܐ ܘܬܬܠ ܚܝܠܐ ܠܗܘ̈ܢܢ. ܕܢܬܗܓܐ ܒܚܝܠ ܟܬ̈ܒܝܗܘܢ ܘܢܬܝܬܪ ܡܢܗܘܢ ܘܬܘܬܪܐ ܕܢܦܩ ܠܢܦܫ̈ܬܢ.

In two passages, the *Ḥudra* praises the same five authors (vol. I, 763), and in a more general way states: “Behold, their accounts [are] in the churches, their books in the monasteries, their reading in the schools, and their chanting by all nations” (vol. I, 773-74). ܗܐ ܒܥܕ̈ܬܐ ܫܪ̈ܒܝܗܘܢ. ܘܒܕܝܪ̈ܬܐ ܟܬ̈ܒܝܗܘܢ. ܘܒܐܣܟܘ̈ܠܐ ܩܪ̈ܝܢܗܘܢ. ܘܒܟܠ ܥܡ̈ܡܝܢ ܡܠܘܫܗܘܢ.

[374] According to Narsai, Theodore of Mopsuestia had lived more than ninety years. In “Memra on Fathers [and] Doctors: Mar Diodore, Mar Theodore and Mar Nestorius”, he wrote, “Theodore lived ninety years and a little more” (ܬܫܥܝܢ ܫܢ̈ܝܢ ܘܬܘܒ ܩܠܝܠ ܚܝܐ ܬܐܕܘܪܘܣ). Thus, Theodore who died in 428 was born few years before 338. See *Homilies of Mar Narsai*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), vol. 1, fol. 141a (277).

3.8 Biblical Citations

John cites the Holy Scriptures hundreds of times throughout *Resh Melle*. He uses the Syriac version of the Old and the New Testaments, the Peshiṭta, not necessarily always literally. His citations can be grouped into four categories. The first group (a) includes exact scriptural quotations; the second (b) includes quotations in which John adds a word or two to clarify the biblical context; the third (c) contains paraphrases of biblical material to clarify the meaning to adapt it to his argument; the fourth (d) includes all cases in which biblical themes or phrases are used, but they do not match known biblical verses. The following examples illustrate how John cites the Bible.

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[375] In his *Catalogue*, ʿAbdishoʿ states that "the [Harmony of the] Gospels, called the *Diatessaron*, was collated by a man of Alexandria named Ammonius, who is Tatian", 12.

[376] One is confused about the title which is given to Abraham: "of the house *Kandoqe*" (ܕܒܝܬ ܟܢܕܘ̈ܩܐ). Is John's "Abraham of Kandoqe" the same well-known fourth-century ascetic *Abraham Qidunaya* (ܩܝܕܘܢܝܐ) who is highly praised in fifteen hymns by Ephrem (see Edmund Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem Des Syres*: Hymnen Auf Abraham Kidunaya und Julianos Saba, (Louvain: CORPUS, 1972), vol. 332, Syr. 1-35 (on Abraham), 36-87 (on Julian Saba). John describes Abraham as follows: "A spiritual market place (ܒܝܬ ܐܬ ܬܓܘܪܬܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ [i.e. school]) he [Abraham] established on earth, and he became like a father for the assembly of Kandoqe; Yoḥannan imitated him and became like him in purity of heart, in faith, and in learning" (fol. 243a). ܐܦ ܐܒܪܗܡ ܕܒܝܬ ܟܢܕܘ̈ܩܐ ܒܪܝܟ ܕܘܒܪܗ: ܕܟܐܡ ܗܘܐ ܗܦܟ ܠܓܒܪܐ ܘܬܪܝܨ ܒܡܫܡܫܢܘܬܗ. ܒܝܬ ܐܬ ܬܓܘܪܬܐ ܪܘܚܢܝܬܐ ܐܩܝܡ ܒܐܪܥܐ. ܘܒܕܡܘܬ ܐܒܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܟܢܘܫܝܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܟܢܕܘ̈ܩܐ. ܒܗܘ ܓܒܪ, ܘܐܬܕܡܝ ܗܘܐ ܐܦ ܝܘܚܢܢ: ܒܕܟܝܘܬ ܠܒܐ ܘܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܥܡ ܘܝܘܠܦܢܐ. Is 'kanoqe' a reference to "the Monastery of Kandaq" (ܕܝܪܐ ܕܟܢܕܩ) in Egypt? See on "ܟܢܕܘܩܐ" and "ܕܝܪܐ ܕܟܢܕܩ" in *Thesaurus Syriacus*, Part I, ed. R. Payne Smith, (London[?]: 1879; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2006), 1764; *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Part I, ed. W. Wright, (London: British Museum, 1870), 258a.

[377] Traditionally, Abraham and Yoḥannan are said to be relatives of Narsai. On Abraham, see Barḥadbešabba, *La seconde partie de l'histoire ecclésiastique*, ed. and trans. F. Nau, *PO* (Paris, 1913, repr. Turnhout: Editions Brepols, 1983), 616-31 [128-43].

John's first and last citations of the Bible are from the epistles of Paul, who is the most quoted biblical author.[378] The first quotation reads, "The ends of ages have come upon us, and judgment stands at the door" (ܫܘܠܡܗܘܢ ܕܥܠܡ̈ܐ ܥܠܝܢ ܡܛ̈ܝ: ܘܕܝܢܐ ܡܟܝܠ ܥܠ ܬܪܥܐ ܩܐܡ) (fol. 4a). The sentence appears to be a single reference, but in fact John is combining two verses from two different contexts to suit his purposes. John first quotes Paul from 1 Cor. 10:11: "The ends of ages have come upon us" (ܫܘܠܡܗܘܢ ܕܥܠܡ̈ܐ ܥܠܝܢ ܡܛ̈ܝ).[379] The apocalyptic theme of this verse, quoted exactly (category a), suits John's purpose, but he gives it more immediacy by adding, "And therefore judgement stands at the door" (ܘܕܝܢܐ ܡܟܝܠ ܥܠ ܬܪܥܐ ܩܐܡ) (Jas 5:9), which introduces a slight variation (category b) from the Peshiṭta, which reads "Behold! Judgement stands before the door" (ܗܐ ܓܝܪ ܕܝܢܐ ܩܕܡ ܬܪܥܐ ܩܐܡ).

At the very end of *Resh Melle*, in his closing words, John offers thanksgiving to God through Jesus Christ, echoing Paul's own prayer for his readers:

> To Him who is able, through a power that is greater than all [others], to work in us more than what we requested and imagined, according to His power which is at work within us, glory to Him in His Church through Jesus Christ, in all generations for ever and ever! Amen. Amen. Amen. And again, Amen. Glory to Him! Glory to Him! Glory to Him! Threefold [glory]! Glory to the exalted Trinity, who strengthens our weakness! Indeed, and Amen! And let the whole people say, 'Amen! Amen!' (fols. 155a-b) (see Eph 3:20-21).
>
> . ܠܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܕܡܨܐ ܒܚܝܠܐ ܝܬܝܪ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܠܢ: ܘܝܬܝܪ ܡܢ ܡܐ ܕܫܐܠܝܢ ܘܪܢܝܢ. ܐܝܟ ܚܝܠܗ ܕܡܬܥܒܕ ܒܢ: ܠܗ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܒܥܕܬܗ ܒܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ. ܒܟܠܗܘܢ ܕܪ̈ܐ ܕܥܠܡ ܥܠܡܝܢ: ܐܡܝܢ. ܐܡܝܢ. ܘܐܡܝܢ. ܘܬܘܒ ܐܡܝܢ. ܫܘܒܚܐ ܠܗ. ܫܘܒܚܐ ܠܗ. ܫܘܒܚܐ ܠܗ. ܬܠܝܬܐܝܬ. ܫܘܒܚܐ ܠܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܡܫܒܚܬܐ: ܕܚܝܠܐ ܠܡܚܝܠܘܬܢ ܐܝܢ ܘܐܡܝܢ. ܘܢܐܡܪ ܟܠܗ ܥܡܐ ܐܡܝܢ.

While John quotes the two verses (vv. 20-21) completely, he seamlessly adds a substantial number of his own words at the end of the quotation, thus expanding the meaning (category d).

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[378] In *Resh Melle*, John quotes Paul 96 times. In 47 of these, Paul is referred to by his name (some of these in the form "the blessed Paul"), and in the rest he is called "the Apostle" or "the blessed Apostle."

[379] The Syriac Peshiṭta reads ܫܘܠܡܗܘܢ ܕܥܠܡ̈ܐ ܥܠܝܢ ܡܛ̈ܝ: ܘܕܝܢܐ ܡܟܝܠ ܥܠ ܬܪܥܐ ܩܐܡ

In book VII, John offers an interpretation of Psalm 45, which he views as Messianic.[380] In the Peshiṭta, verse 3 reads, “Place the sword [in the sheath] at your back, O mighty one” (ܐܪܡܐ ܣܝܦܐ ܒܚܨ̈ܝܟ ܓܒܪܐ; *arma saypa bḥaṣṣayk gabbara*) (fol. 65b). Here John introduces a different reading: “Fasten the sword by your thigh, O mighty one” (ܐܣܘܪ ܣܝܦܐ ܥܠ ܚܠܨ̈ܝܟ ܓܒܪܐ) (fol. 66a). John offers a variant reading (category c) that would be better understood by a Syrian reader. Presumably, for his readers, a warrior would be more likely to carry his sword in a sheath along his thigh and not on his back, which was the normal place for arrows.

In another place, John looks to Isaiah’s prophecy regarding the servant who becomes light to the nations (see Is 42:1-9). The Peshiṭta (v. 2) reads, “He will not cry, nor lift up, nor make his voice heard in the street” (ܠܐ ܢܩܥܐ: ܘܠܐ ܢܪܝܡ. ܘܠܐ ܢ݂ܫܡܥ ܩܠܗ ܒܫܘܩܐ). John cites the first part of the verse directly (category a) according to Peshiṭta: “He will not cry, nor lift up” (ܕܠܐ ܠܡ ܢܩܥܐ: ܘܠܐ ܢܪܝܡ). The second part of the verse, however, is altered: “And no man will hear his voice in the street” (ܘܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܢܹܫܡܥ ܩܠܗ ܒܫܘܩܐ) (fol. 88b). Here John adds (ܐܢܫ) (an example of category b) and changes the causative verb (ܢ݂ܫܡܥ) into a regular form (ܢܹܫܡܥ) (category c).

At another place, John offers his interpretation of Psalm 2, which is viewed as Messianic. In the Peshiṭta, verse 9 of the psalm reads, “You will shepherd them with a rod of iron, and crush them like clay vessels” (ܬܪܥܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܒܫܒܛܐ ܕܦܪܙܠܐ. ܘܐܝܟ ܡܐܢ̈ܐ ܦܚܪܐ ܬܪܥܘܥ ܐܢܘܢ). In John’s quotation, the first part of the verse reads: “You will shepherd them with the scourge” (ܬܪܥܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܒܡܪ̈ܓܢܐ), replacing the word *parzla* (ܦܪܙܠܐ) with *margane* (ܡܪ̈ܓܢܐ), thus making it an example of category (b). In the second part of the verse, John has, “and to cleanse them like clay vessels from all impurity of body and soul” (ܘܐܝܟ ܡܐܢ̈ܐ ܦܚܪܐ ܬܪܥܘܥ ܐܢܘܢ: ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܛܘܠܫܬܐ ܕܒܣܪܐ

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[380] Psalm 45 is also interpreted in a Messianic way by Ishoʿdad (see *Commentaire d’Ishoʿdad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament, VI, Psaumes,* ed. Ceslas van den Eynde, CSCO 433 (Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 66-72, and Rabban Denḥa (MMC, Syr. 58, fols. 64a-66a).

ܘܕܪܘܚܐ.), which is an exact quotation (category a). But here the words added at the end (category d) affect the interpretation of the main verb (ܢܦܨ). The standard translations read this verb in its Pael form, which, when used in association with clay vessels, normally means ‘to break’ or ‘to smash’. John also has the Pael form of the verb here, but its meaning ends up being closer to the Peal form of the verb, which can mean ‘to shake out’, i.e. ‘to clean’.

3.9 Surviving Manuscripts

Few manuscripts of *Resh Melle* have survived. T. Jansma, in his fundamental 1963 study, presents a list of fourteen manuscript sources (only two of which are incomplete) known to exist with information about their locations.[381] Several of these were copied from a now lost manuscript of Tabriz, copied in the year 1573 of the Greeks (1262 A.D.). Four manuscripts from Jansma’s list were consulted for the purpose of this study:

3.9.1 Bibliotheque de l’Université de Strasbourg,[382] No. 4133 (BS): According to its colophon it was copied and completed in the region of Alqosh, Nineveh on the 18th of the month of Kanon I (December), 1897, by the copyist ʿIsa the deacon, son of Eshatta, son Quryaqos the deacon of *Eqror* village in the land of *Sendaye*.

3.9.2 Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris, R 90793, Syriaque 405, R 90794, Syriaque 406 (BP):

The colophon of this manuscript also states that it was copied in the region of Alqosh, on the 18th of the month of Iyyar (May), 1900, by the copyist “Abraham (priest), son of

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[381] See Appendix A.

[382] According to Jansma, this manuscript was copied for A. Baumstark and acquired by the Bibliotheque de l’Université de Strasbourg in 1917 (see Jansma, “Project”, 99).

Shemʿon, son of Abraham, son of Shemʿon the priest of the house of Israel the priest, who are well known and called *Beth Shekwana,* of Alqosh."

3.9.3 British Library OR 9385 (BL): According to the colophon, it was copied in Qudshanos, in the region of Hakkari, on the 3rd of the month Shbaṭ (*February*), 1901, by the scribe Ishoʿ the archdeacon, son of Laʿazar the priest, of the family of Qasha, from a family [that traces its] origin to Arbela. This manuscript is important because it was copied from a manuscript of Tabriz dated to 1262, which was itself copied by a priest who does not reveal his name[383] but who claims to be among those who remained after the Mongols took captives and plunder from the city of Arbela, an event which occurred in 1260.[384]

3.9.4 *The Mingana Manuscript* No. 179 (MM): This is part of *The Syriac Manuscripts of Mingana Collections*. Its colophon indicates that it was copied and completed in the region of Alqosh, Nineveh, on the 22nd of the month of *Elol* (September), 1928, by the scribe Joseph (deacon), son of Thomas, son of Sipa (deacon), son of Peter (priest), of the *Abuna family,* of Alqosh.

Now, both BL and the second manuscript which Mingana consulted for his 1908 edition (not to be confused with Mingana Syr. 179) claim to have been copied from the 13th century manuscript of Tabriz. BL, however, seems superior to Mingana's second manuscript since it includes, after an index (fols. 1b-3a), and after the *Resh Melle* itself (fols. 3b-155b), a number of *memre* attributed to John (fols. 155b-244b) that the scribe, in his colophon (fols. 244b-247a), affirms were also copied from the Tabriz manuscript. Nowhere in his edition does Mingana mention any additional *memre* by John, which would imply that the mysterious 1840 manuscript (section 2.2.2.3) did not include them.[385]

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[383] We are able to identify the name of this priest, however. In 1908, Mingana edited Chapters X-XV of the Syriac text of *Resh Melle*, and supplied a French translation of Chapter XV, on the basis of two Syriac manuscripts, one of which appears in Jansma's list, while the other is said by Mingana to have been copied in 1840. Mingana tells us that this second manuscript was copied from an ancient manuscript which belonged to Beth Mar Shemʿon, the Catholicos, in the year 1573 A.G. in the city of Tabriz by the famous physician Sabrishoʿ the priest.

[384] David Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East* (London: East & West Publishing, 2011), 237.

The BL manuscript compiled other materials of John's works, as is noted by the copyist:

> The copying of this work is completed. It contains two parts: a historical account of the temporal world, and the book *On Virginity and Holiness*, and metric *memre*. [All] are composed by a great one among intellectuals, famous among orthodox [fathers], well known among the wise, Mar Yoḥannan the holy Iḥidaya, who is united with the Humble One of excellent truth. He is called after the name of his village, 'Penkaya' (fol. 244b).
>
> ܫܠܡ ܠܡܟܬܒ ܟܬܒܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܬܪܬܝܢ ܦܠܓ̈ܘܬܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܙܒܢܝܐ. ܘܟܬܒܐ ܕܥܠ ܒܬܘܠܘܬܐ ܘܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ
> ܘܡܐܡܪ̈ܐ ܕܡܫܘ̈ܚܬܐ: ܕܚܒܝܫ ܠܪܒܐ ܒܝܘ̈ܠܦܢܘܬܐ: ܘܡܫܒܚܐ ܒܐܪ̈ܬܕܘܟܣܐ: ܘܡܦܪܣܡܐ ܒܚܟܝܡܘܬܗܘܢ: ܘܪܝܫܐ ܡܪܝ،
> ܝܘܚܢܢ ܩܕܝܫܐ. ܐܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܕܚܕ ܥܡ ܡܟܝܟܐ ܒܫܪܪܐ ܕܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ. ܕܡܬܩܪܐ ܥܠ ܫܡ ܩܪܝܬܗ ܦܢܟܝܐ.

Strangely enough, the additional *memre* of John bar Penkaye have also gone unnoticed by Syriac scholars to this day.

3.10 Editions, Translations, and Scholarship

In the 1720s, Assemani published the *Catalogue* of ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, with his own remarks and comments throughout. On pages 189-90, where the works of John are listed, Assemani offers brief remarks on each of John's works. In 1898, part of the sixth book of *Resh Melle* was published in the *Book of Partute* (lit. "Crumbs"), by the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission in Urmia, Iran. This book is a compilation that includes a number of selected treatises or hymns by many early eastern and western Syriac authors, including John of Phenek.

As mentioned above, in 1901, Baumstark published an article entitled "Eine syrishe Weltgeschichte des siebten Jahrh.s", which provided the first known overview of all fifteen books of *Resh Melle*. In 1907, Scher published an article entitled "Notice sur la vie et les œuvres de Yoḥannan bar Penkayé," which included a short biography of John bar Penkaye with a brief summary of each of the books of *Resh Melle*. In 1908, Alphonse Mingana edited the second part of *Resh Melle* (Books X-XV), but limited his French translation to Book XV. More recently, in 1987, the last part of Book XIV and all of Book XV were translated by Sebastian Brock into English.[386] I am not aware of any other complete or partial translation of *Resh Melle* into any other language.[387] While John has attracted a modest amount of scholarly attention, no monograph has yet been dedicated to his work. The present thesis aims to fill this gap.

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[385] However, there is a manuscript at The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Science in St. Petersburg (*The Chronicle of Yohannan bar Penkaye*, Syr. 24, 232 fols.), copied in 1840, which I have not been able to access. Since the BL manuscript, with its additional *memre*, has 243 folios, there is a strong possibility that this St. Petersburg manuscript also contains additional material beyond *Resh Melle*. Given that it was copied in the same year as the manuscript consulted by Mingana, it may be identical with the latter.

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[386] Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century."

[387] I am presently working on a critical edition of *Resh Melle* and am nearing completion of an English translation.

Chapter 4

Literary Genres in *Resh Melle*

Early studies on *Resh Melle* shared a general view that the work is essentially apocalyptic because the apocalyptic genre is clearly attested within the work. This particular genre is clearly seen in certain sections of the work, but mainly towards its end.[388] However, an analysis of *Resh Melle* reveals that John uses a number of literary genres throughout his work. In this chapter, the following genres will be explored and their role in John's work explained: historiography; theology; apocalypse; exegesis; pedagogy; homily; philosophy.

4.1 Historiography[389]

As argued above (section 3.5), it is very clear that John intended his work to contribute to the theological education of his readers. It is the theological interpretation of historical narrative that is the aim of *Resh Melle*. Within the framework of theological history, John makes use of a variety of genres (discussed below), including a number of sub-genres within historiography.

Let us begin, however, with an examination of the technical terms that John employs to refer to his own activity as a writer. An examination of such terms in their various contexts will contribute to our understanding of how John viewed history and its representation.

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[388] The actual amount of text devoted to what might be considered apocalyptic themes represents only a fraction of the whole, though it is concentrated near the end of Book XV. The total word count of the Syriac text of *Resh Melle* is about 68,500, excluding the colophon. The apocalyptic material in Book XV amounts to about 2700 words (i.e. about 4% of the whole).

[389] For discussions of Syriac historiography, see Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Maḥre,*; *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, eds. Andrew Palmer, Sebastian Brock, Robert Hoyland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993); James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to A World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); *Writing 'True Stories': Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medival Near East*, eds. Arietta Papaconstantinou, Muriel Debié, Hugh Kennedy (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010); Philip Wood, *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

4.1.1 Terms with historical connotation

John employs many terms of historical connotations in *Resh Melle*, each of which may change its meaning slightly depending on the context: i) *tashʿitha* (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ); ii) *suʿrana* (ܣܘܥܪܢܐ); iii) *sharba* (ܫܪܒܐ); iv) *tni* (ܬܢܝ; occurs in various verbal forms); v) *ʿuhdana* (ܥܘܗܕܢܐ); vi) *mlo'a* (ܡܠܘܐܐ); vii) *makhtwanutha* (ܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ); viii) *ṭebba* (ܛܒܐ); ix) *kunasha* (ܟܘܢܫܐ).

4.1.1.1 *tashʿitha* (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ)

Tashʿitha is a key historiographical term in *Resh Melle* since it appears in its main title in all four of the manuscripts consulted for this study.[390] Since John himself uses the term frequently to refer to his own work, we can be sure that the term was not incorporated into the title of *Resh Melle* by later copyists.The term in its various forms is attested thirty times in *Resh Melle*, generally denoting an account of events or activites that have occurred in the past.[391] Its precise meaning differs, however, in different contexts. Examples of this term from various contexts in *Resh Melle* are as follows:

> In addition, I am planning to write to you, O trustworthy companion, a valuable history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) of significant accounts (fol. 3b).
>
> With the assistance of the Lord, we now begin [to relate] the history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) of events which have taken place and which are taking place in this temporal world (fol. 3b).
>
> Therefore, at first it is proper for me to describe the external natures that were created together with us for our benefit, the organized assembly of this world, and the great wisdom that is hidden within it. This too is a part of the history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) of God's grace toward us, for all [things] that have come into being have been created to help us (fol. 4a).

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[390] See Appendix B. All four manuscripts begin with the following words: "Upon the might of our Lord Jesus Christ we begin to copy the work *Resh Melle*, a *tashʿitha* concerning the temporal world, which is composed by the holy Mar Yoḥannan bar Penkaye."

[391] Narsai, however, uses the term *tashʿitha* in at least one passage to mean 'myth' or 'fiction': ܐܝܟ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܚܫܝܒ ܣܘܥܪܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ: ܘܕܚܠ ܟܠܢܫ ܟܕ ܠܐ ܕܚܠ ܫܪܝܪܐܝܬ ("The account of the world to come is considered [to be] like a myth; everyone fears while not truly fearing"). See "On admonition and its suitability for Rogation ܥܠ ܡܟܣܢܘܬܐ ܘܠܚܡ ܠܒܥܘܬܐ", in *Homilies of Mar Narsai II*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), fols. 418b-419a.

> For it is not inappropriate, while we are narrating the account (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) of the temporal world, that we, at the same time, reveal what the blessed have done generation after generation. And wicked people have ventured to act against them (fol. 19b).

> My strong desire is to relate in this book the account (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) of these youth [i.e. the Maccabees] as it is, and not according to my [normal] custom of speaking in brief (fol. 23b).

> Now let us narrate (ܢܫܬܥܐ) another account (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) from the third book of Maccabees. From this you may better understand the great might of God and His care for His people (fol. 33a).

> Therefore, no one should blame us when he sees that we have compiled material from [many] books for our accounts (ܠܬܫܥܝ̈ܬܢ) (fol. 37a).

> Therefore, let us acknowledge that all [the accounts] of this book [i.e. Genesis] are not prophecies of things to come, but a history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) of distant events which have passed (fol. 50a).

> Now, I am listing a few [details] in this work according to the goal which I have set. O my beloved one, you are able to learn completely concerning these [events] from the history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) which is written by Josephus about the destruction of Jerusalem (fol. 121b).

> This history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) of the temporal world, O our beloved Sabrisho, contains [only] brief [accounts] for the most part. We produced this history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) through *resh melle* (i.e. 'in brief'), since aside from this we would have been unable [to complete] this composition [in due time]. Thus, we set down the main points [only], and you will find that all of our books have been completed [in this way] (fol. 155a).

As seen above, John uses the verbal form *neshtaʿe* ("to tell" or "to narrate") besides the noun *tashʿitha* (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) to denote history writing. In his paraphrase of Psalm 2:6, however, the term takes on a different meaning as John highlights the Christological meaning of the verse:

> I have established this one you crucified as king on Zion, my holy hill, to declare (ܢܫܬܥܐ) concerning my covenant[392] (fol. 61b).

4.1.1.2 *suʿrana* (ܣܘܥܪܢܐ)

The term occurs in its various forms 43 times and generally that which constitutes history, i.e. an 'action', 'activity', or 'event'.

> The task (ܣܘܥܪܢܐ) that we have begun is too great and exceeds our ability. (fol. 4a)
> Now, by the grace of Christ, the sayings of the prophets and the actions (ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ) [recorded] in the Law have received [their] fulfillment (fol. 47b).

> [Let us] understand that all these [events] of this book [of Genesis] are not a prophecy that [depicts] future [things], but they are a history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) of events (ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ) that have already happened and passed (fol. 50a).

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[392] Here John paraphrases Psalm 2:6 in order to give it a Christological connotation. According to the Syriac Peshiṭṭa version, the psalm reads: "I have set my king on Zion, my holy mountain; He will declare my Covenant" (ܐܢܐ ܐܩܝܡܬ ܡܠܟܝ ܥܠ ܨܗܝܘܢ ܛܘܪܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܝ: ܕܐܫܬܥܐ ܥܠ ܩܝܡܝ).

> And in the fourth [book] he writes and shows the number of the Israelites, along with the rest of the events (ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ) that happened to them in the wilderness (fol. 52a).

> But let us return to the thread of our argument, for our goal is to demonstrate that the entire first testament contained the aim and the declaration of the second, either through actions (ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ), with their hidden meanings, or through words, as in prophecy (fol. 64b).

> We have not set ourselves to demonstrate temporal events (ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ) which happened at one time or another, but rather how these things concerning [our salvation] were arranged by divine dispensation (fols. 134a-b).

4.1.1.3 Sharba (ܫܪܒܐ)

The term occurs in its various forms 16 times. Its general meaning is ‘story’, but in the sense of ‘historical account’.

> But now we have assigned a different goal for ourselves in this book, and it is not necessary to search after lengthy discourse. Rather, we only need to demonstrate those things that are appropriate to the account (ܫܪܒܐ), to make known all the things that God has done for the human race, and the things that humans have done in every generation (fol. 6b).

> Likewise, we desire that this discourse of ours would gain strength from [various] accounts (ܫܪ̈ܒܐ) that were compiled through hard labour from [various] books and from nature (fol. 23b).

> This ought to be said briefly lest we lenghthen our *memra*, since many accounts (ܫܪ̈ܒܐ) are set before us to be clarified, but we are obliged to make their commentary concise (fol. 55a).

> I am always reminding you, O Sabrishoʿ, beloved of my soul, concerning the goal that we have set for ourselves. Without setting forth in detail a multitude of accounts (ܫܪ̈ܒܐ), lest we become confused and go astray in [the writing] of this book that we have called *Resh Melle*, this has been our goal from the beginning... (fol. 101b).

4.1.1.4 *tni* (ܬܢܝ)

Across 10 occurrences in total, three forms of the verb are attested: *ʻethne* (ܐܬ݂ܢܐ); *nethne* (ܢܶܬ݂ܢܐ); and *ntanne* (ܢܬ݁ܢܐ). The meaning of the root is ‘to repeat’, but it often means ‘to tell’ (i.e. ‘to narrate’) or ‘to recite’.

The first form, *ʻethne* (ܐܬ݂ܢܐ ; Peal imperfect), is attested only once:

> I have no desire to leave them in silence and am unable to reduce all of them to a [single] statement. For I squeeze them all into my heart. This saying urges me to narrate (ܐܬ݂ܢܐ) it, while that one says to me, ‘Do not abandon me’. Another one says, ‘I should go out first’... (fols. 60b-61a).

The form (ܢܶܬ݂ܢܐ ; Peal imperfect) is used four times,

> This has been said by us concerning them in another book and it is not necessary to repeat (ܢܬܢܐ) it again (fol. 5a).

> Lest we recount (ܢܬܢܐ) all the things [that we have said], and load our discourse with extra labour, we will only recall a few of them, according to what is required by the order of what we are going to say (fol. 82a).

The form (ܢܬܢܐ ; Pael imperfect) is used five times,

> For this is our goal: not to narrate (ܢܬܢܐ) those things which did not exist or were not yet in existence, but those things that came into being and happened long ago in this temporal world, as much as we may compile and arrange (fol. 23b).
> Likewise, [the angels] were also sent to demonstrate [God's] assistance and [to show] the revelation of future events to mankind. "Behold, I am sending my messenger before you, that he might protect you and cause you to enter into the land which I have formed [i.e. 'prepared' for you]" (Mal. 3:1). [There are] many other [examples] like these (of Noah and Balaam, [for example]), [but] it is not necessary to recite (ܢܬܢܐ) them all" (fols. 117a-b).

4.1.1.5 *ʿuhdana* (ܥܘܗܕܢܐ)

This term occurs 13 times in *Resh Melle*, and its main meaning is 'a memory' or 'a commemoration':

> His plan [i.e. the king] was to do this in order that, for generations to come, his name and his strength might be remembered (ܫܡܐ ܕܥܘܗܕܢܐ ܕܠܕܪ̈ܘܬܗ) (fol. 35a).

> Therefore, in these *memre* (books) you have material [with which], when you bring to mind (ܟܕ ܡܥܠܐ ܐܢܬ ܥܠ ܥܘܗܕܢܟ) the early [events] and compare them with these last ones, from this point on, you will learn in which direction the excellent improvement God has transformed [the old covenant] through the manifestation of his Son (fol. 113a).

The term can also refer to the 'remembrance' of historical events either as transmitted orally as a 'living memory':

> [Moses] narrates concerning past events. Often the memory (ܥܘܗܕܢܗܝܢ) of these [accounts] is preserved through [oral] transmission from one to another. (fol. 50a)

A similar thought is expressed in the following passage, though the term in question is not used:

> [F]rom [the time] that Muʿawiya began to rule, the tranqility in the whole world was such that we had not heard of or seen anything like it from our fathers or from our grandfathers (fols. 146a-b).

4.1.1.6 *mlo'a* (ܡܠܘܐܐ)

The term occurs seven times in *Resh Melle*, either with the literal meaning of 'material,' i.e. material elements, or in the sense of 'literary material' used in writing history:

> For ‘creation’ refers to something that did not exist and came into being, but ‘assembly’ requires that which is created and exists and needs to be fashioned, just as with a ship or a house; their materials (ܡܠܘܐܗܘܢ) are gathered, yet they have not received their structure and decoration (fol. 5a).
>
> Therefore, no one should blame us when he sees that we have compiled material (ܡܠܘ̈ܐܐ) from [many] works (ܟܬ̈ܒܐ) for our accounts (ܠܬܫ̈ܥܝܬܢ)” (fol. 37a).
>
> ... [F]ire is hidden in its essence, but when it takes hold of materials (ܒܡܠܘ̈ܐܐ) it then gives light and heat and clothes that which it takes hold of in its own image. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is hidden and concealed in her essence from all creatures, but is revealed in her recipients, that is to say, rational beings (fols. 128a-b).

4.1.1.7 *makhtwanutha* (ܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ)

This key historiographical term occurs only three times in *Resh Melle*, twice referring to the Goseps as compositions and once to John’s own work:

> When the Apostles approached the composition (ܠܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ) of the gospels... (fol. 132a).
>
> Thus, it is with this goal [in mind] that the blessed John [the evangelist] approached the composition (ܠܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ) of this gospel (fol. 132b).
>
> We produced this history through *resh melle* [i.e. ‘in brief’], since aside from this we would have been unable [to complete] this composition (ܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ) [in due time] (fol. 155a).

4.1.1.8 *ṭebba* (ܛܒܐ)

The term occurs only twice in *Resh Melle* to refer to historical events transmitted as pieces of ‘news’:

> In that time, the news (ܛܒܐ) was heard that Antiochus had died in Egypt (fol. 22a).
>
> News (ܛܒ̈ܐ) came to us from our surroundings about captives and plagues... (fol. 149a).

4.1.1.9 *kunasha* (ܟܘܢܫܐ)

This noun is not used in *Resh Melle*, but John uses the verb form *nkhannesh* (ܢܟܢܫ ; ‘we may gather’ or ‘we may compile’) seven times:

> For this is our goal: not to narrate those things which did not exist or were not yet in existence, but those things that came into being and happened long ago in this temporal world, as much as we may compile (ܢܟܢܫ) and arrange (ܘܢܣܕܘܪ) (fol. 23b).
>
> ... [W]e do not set out to interpret (ܕܢܦܫܩ), but only to gather (ܕܢܟܢܫ) proofs (ܬܚܘ̈ܝܬܐ) which support our account (ܠܫܪܒܢ) (fol. 74b).

> But lest, dealing with many [points], we remain with this *memra* for a long time, let us compile (ܟܢܫ) a few things from many [sources] and manifest the aim of our discourse (fol. 87b).
>
> Thus, we were able to gather (ܟܢܫ) [i.e. 'to keep'] the length of our account within a [certain] limit and boundary (fol. 100b).

Interestingly, the terms 'chronicle' (ܟܪܘܢܝܩܘܢ), 'ecclesiastical history' (ܐܩܠܣܝܣܛܝܩܝ), and *makthwanutha dzawne* (ܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ ܕܙܒܢ̈ܐ) are not found in *Resh Melle*.

4.1.1.10 Summary of the evidence

It must be said from the outset that all the terms used by John are known in the field of Syriac historiography. It is noteworthy, however, that he does not employ such key historiographical terms as 'chronicle' (ܟܪܘܢܝܩܘܢ), 'ecclesiastical history' (ܐܩܠܣܝܣܛܝܩܝ), and *makthwanutha dzawne* (ܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ ܕܙܒܢ̈ܐ), which were familiar to his contemporary Jacob of Edessa.[393]

John's choice of terms tells us something about how his process of writing, i.e. how he searched out his sources, whether texual materials (ܡܠ̈ܐܐ) of different accounts (ܫܪ̈ܒܐ) and events (ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ) or oral memories (ܥܘܗܕ̈ܢܐ) and news (ܛܒ̈ܐ), and gathered (ܟܢܫ) them together for his composition (ܡܟܬܒܢܘܬܐ), which he entitles "*Resh Melle* ['main points']: a *tashʿita* (history) of the temporal world." They also reveal that John clearly knows what he is writing: "It is not secular events[394] (ܣܘܥܪ̈ܢܐ ܥܠܡܢ̈ܝܐ) that we have set ourselves the task of revealing (namely, what has happened (ܗܘܐ) at this time (ܒܗܢ ܙܒܢܐ) or that time), but rather how these things were arranged (ܐܬܦܪܣܘ) through divine dispensation (ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܐܠܗܝܬܐ)" (fols. 134a-b). Thus his work is not a chronicle in which events are arranged annalistically, nor is it an ecclesiastical history in which administration and dogmatic theology are the key elements. Rather, it is a history "arranged," i.e. interpreted, from a theological view of God's dispensation. John gives another insight that his history is theological because the material of his 'history' is selective: "We produced this history (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ) through *resh melle* (i.e. 'in main points'), since aside from this we would have been unable [to complete] this composition [in due time]" (fol. 155a).

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[393] By the time that John composed *Resh Melle* (687 A.D.), the genres of 'chronicle' and 'ecclesiastial history' were well known in the Church of the East, but he chose not to use either of these formats.

[394] John includes within the text of *Resh Melle* three lists of kings in which the rulers are listed in sequence. Thus, at the end of book II, John provides a list of the kings of Judea and Israel who ruled until the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezer (fols. 14a; 17a-b). The second one is a short list of ten kings who ruled over Babylon. Its first eight rulers are Assyrian-Babylonian kings, while the last two are Medes. John states that the Babylonian kingdom was destroyed by the Persians (fol. 18a). His third list gives the names of the successors of Alexander the Great (fols. 28b; 120a).

In an analysis of the genre of hagiography, Muriel Debié argues that "[a] reference to 'brevity' is simply an acknowledgement that a selection had had to be made in the life and actions of the heroes described." She then continues with the observation that "[h]istorians too were engaged in the same process when they wrote their chronicles 'in short', or 'as a summary', because they too would never have been able to describe all that occurred in history, but were forced to make a selection."[395] With regard to *Resh Melle* we can add that the author's "theological" view of history led him to make his own "slections" to serve his literary plan, and he indeed draws not on past chronicles and histories but on Holy Scriptures, including historical accounts, and on theological and exegetical works.[396]

Certain historiographical terms used by John, namely *sharba* (ܫܪܒܐ) and *tashʿita* (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ), highlight the amalgamation of two independent genres in Syriac, historiography and hagiography. Muriel Debié argues that "historians writing in Syriac do not write history in the same way on opposite sides of the frontier between the Roman and the Sasanian Empires."[397] While West Syrian historians produce their ecclesistical histories and chronographies according to the models of Eusebius, East Syrian historians recount both genres as 'stories'.[398] As she observes, "East Syrian histories took a form that is seldom taken into account [by modern scholars] or even recognized as being distinctive."[399] Debié and Witakowski[400] observe that, alone in the field of East Syrian historiography, the *Chronicle of Elijah* follows the pattern of Western chronicles based on Eusebius. By contrast, Debié argues, "all other surviving East Syrian historical texts... have one significant feature in common, which is to rely on biographies. The literary models they follow are not the expected Western Christian ones of ecclesiastical histories and chronicles but biographical histories of the kind used for Greek histories of philosophy."[401]

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[395] See Muriel Debié, "Writing History as 'Histories': The Biographical Dimention of East Syriac Historiography" in *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 49.
[396] On John's sources, see 3.7.

Joel Walker makes a similar point:

> East Syrian writers inherited both the chronicle and church history genres from Syriac translations of Eusebius, but the genres' development in the Church of the East quickly became intertwined with hagiography[402]... Syriac Christian writers use one and the same word, *tashʿita* – from a verbal root

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[397] See Muriel Debié, "Writing History as 'Histories': The Biographical Dimention of East Syriac Historiography" in *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 44.

[398] Muriel Debié, 43-44. As Debié notes, contemporary scholars have begun to recognize that the hagiography and historiography of late antiquity "combine, to varying degrees, both literary and historiographic features." Such sources often preserve many details about the ordinary lives of their subjects and about typical attitudes of their day.

[399] See Muriel Debié, "Writing History as 'Histories': The Biographical Dimention of East Syriac Historiography" in *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 45.

[400] Witakowski states that "[The Chronicle of Eliyya] is the only example of a chronicle of Eusebian type known to be composed by an East Syrian historian." See Witold Witakowski, "Elias Barshenaya's Chronicle", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta: Syriac Polemics*, (Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 219.

[401] See Muriel Debié, "Writing History as 'Histories': The Biographical Dimention of East Syriac Historiography" in *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 58.

[402] "Writing 'histories', 'stories', is what East Syrian historieans and hagiographers alike claim to be doing, since both groups use the same technical terminology." See Muriel Debié, "Writing History as 'Histories': The Biographical Dimention of East Syriac Historiography" in *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 43.

> meaning to 'tell' or 'narrate' – to describe works that modern scholarship categorizes as either history or hagiography.[403]

But *Resh Melle* is not just a combination of history and hagiography, as Debié also noted:

> The *Book of the First Principles of the History of the Temporal World* by John of Phenek is as odd as its title implies. It belongs more to the genre of historical apocalypses, like the *Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius*, than to the bulk of historical writings, and is probably better understood as a theological rather than as a historical work, unless strictly religious history is meant.[404]

Our study of the several genres reflected in *Resh Melle* confirms that John's work should be understood as a theological history of God's soteriological dispensation. We reject the idea, however, that John's work should be primarily understood as a historical apocalypse, since apart from a major section at the end, the apocalyptic reflections of the author are found in only a few sections of the work (section 4.3). The impression that *Resh Melle* is primarily an apocalypse is perhaps due to the lack of a full critical edition, and even more crucially, the fact that modern translations of the text have been limited to Book XIV (and here only the very end) and Book XV. In short, *Resh Melle* is a universal history which is theologically motivated.

4.1.2 Universal History

Certain early Christian chronicles and histories fall within the genre of universal history since the intention of the author is to produce a historical work that begins with the biblical creation account and extends to his own day.[405] Such an author would compose his work by harmonizing the biblical narratives with secular histories drawn from classical sources.[406]

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[403] See Joel Walker, "A Saint and his Biographer in Late Antique Iraq: the History of St. George of Izla (†614) by Babai the Great", in *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 31-41.

[404] See Muriel Debié, "Writing History as 'Histories': The Biographical Dimention of East Syriac Historiography" in *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 56.

[405] Chronicles that fall within the category of 'Universal History' include those written by Eusebius, Jacob of Edessa, and the first part of the *Chronicle* of Eliyya bar Shennaya *Opus Chronologicum*.

[406] Howard-Johnston, James. *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century,* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).
Howard-Johnston, 41-44.

John describes his work as a "history of the temporal world." This description indicates that the author's intention was to produce a historical account (fol. 3a). Since the work begins with the biblical creation as described in the book of *Genesis,* the author's intention to write a universal history is made clear. As John says, 'We have made our work begin at the time when God also commenced His blessings towards us' (fol. 123b).[407] From this beginning, the author follows the biblical narrative, right through to the end of Book XIII, but selects only certain events to discuss, those that fit his theological agenda. On occasion, however, John goes beyond the biblical narrative. In Book IX, for example, John includes a description of the beliefs and deities of various nations in the era before Christ. No sources for this information are identified, but John probably relied on Syriac versions of Greek patristic authors. Likewise, in Book XII he includes a list of Hellenistic and Roman rulers and a discussion of the Judean War and the destruction of Jerusalem. For recent and contemporary events, John focuses much more on his own immediate vicinity. At the end of book XIV (fols. 143b-144a), and in book XV (fols. 144a-155b), John narrates events of the seventh century up to his own day. Continuing his practice of inserting secular history when necessary, he notes that the kingdom of the Persians came to an end in the days of their king Chosroes II,[408] and reminds the reader that, in a very short time, the children of Hagar (that is, the Arabs) were able to take control of all Persian territory (fol. 144a).[409]

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[407] The Syriac text of *Resh Melle* according to BL (fol. 123b) reads, ܕܐܝܟܢܐ ܘܒܡܢܐ ܐܬܚܫܠ ܠܗ ܠܥܠܡܐ ܡܬܡܠܠ: ܥܠ ܬܘܪܝ ܗܘܝ ܘܫܘܚܠܦܝ ܕܒܢܝܢܫܐ. ܗ̈ܢ ܒܒܢܝܢ ܫܘܪܝܐ ܠܡܠܟܘܬܐ: ܒܝܕ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܫܪܝ، ܒܡܫܬܥܝܢܘܬܗ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ.

[408] Borck argues, "Khusrau II had in fact died in 628, prior to the collapse of the Sasanian empire." See "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John bar Penkaye's Resh Melle*"*, 57.

[409] John's hint would clearly suggest that Chosroes II (590-628) was the last strong Sasanian king [see Eliyya ba Shennaya, 128]. In fact he was succeeded by ineffective kings (628-645), [see a list of Sasanian kings by Eliyya bar Shennaya, 43] when the Arab conquest of Persia began 636 A.D.

4.1.3 Theological History

The first impression given by the title of John's work is that its main purpose is to narrate historical events. However, as Baumstark observed long ago, the work is best described as a *theological* history.[410] Given the evidence surveyed in the previous section, we would argue that an even better description of the work would be 'theological universal history', or, as Sebastian Brock calls it, "a theologically orientated world history."[411] The theological nature of the work is reflected in the fact that John relies more on biblical and theological sources than historical ones.

John clearly states that the focus of his work is not secular history, but history as directed by the active role of the divine dispensation: "It is not secular events that we have set ourselves the task of revealing (namely, what has happened at this time or that time), but rather how these things were arranged through divine dispensation" (fols. 134a-b).[412] John's wants to illustrate how God is actively involved in the history of mankind, intervening whenever it pleases Him. For example, the fall of the Babylonian empire and the rise of the Medes happened according to the divine plan (fol. 18b), and the collapse of the Sasanian Empire at the hands of the Arabs is also an act of God. He is convinced that, apart from God's intervention, the Arabs would have been unable to gain their victory over the Persian Empire (fol. 144a): although "the Arabs were naked" and without weapons or shields, God intervened on their side. He quotes from the Psalms to describe the situation: "One man would chase a thousand and two men were causing ten thousand to flee" (fol. 144a).[413]

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[410] See Baumstark, "Eine syrishe Weltgeschichte des siebten Jahrh.s", 273-280.

[411] Brock Sebastian, "Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources," *Journal of the Iraqi Academy (Syriac Corporation),* 5, (1979/80), 1-30.

[412] ܒܪ ܠܘ ܗܘܦܟ̈ܐ ܥܠܡܢ̈ܝܐ ܣܝܡܐ ܠܢ ܕܢܚܘܐ: ܕܡܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܗܢ ܙܒܢܐ: ܐܘ ܗܢܐ ܒܗܘܢ: ܐܠܐ ܕܐܝܟܢܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܝܠܗ ܒܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ ܐܠܗܝܬܐ ܐܬܦܪܣܘ.

[413] Deut 32:30.

John also seeks to demonstrate that God would sometimes abandon the people of Israel and allow their suffering if they had sinned and gone astray by venerating and worshiping other gods:

> Even during the reign of the judges the [Israelites] abandoned the Lord and worshipped other gods. They walked by the laws of the nations who surrounded them, sacrificed to demons and laid incense before idols. They angered the Lord in all their actions. And the Lord began to provoke the surrounding nations against them' (fol. 13b).

At other times, God would hear the sufferings and supplications of the Jewish people and intervene to save them. For example, in the time of the Maccabees, He sent his warrior angel, mounted on a great and terrible horse, in order to disturb the mind of Heliodorus (fol. 20b). Victory was seen as a divine reward as long as the people of Israel remained faithful to God and obedient to His laws. As John says concerning Judah Maccabee:

> From [this book] one can clearly learn how many deeds God has performed through Judah Maccabee and his bothers for the Jewish people. Judah never returned from a place without a victory, and he never knew defeat. With confidence, he always prepared for victory, for his trust was not in human might or weapons. They were few in number; carrying only spears, their strength and support was from God (fol. 32b).

When John narrates the events of the Maccabean revolt, he refers to heavenly visions which clearly manifest divine intervention[414] and terrify their enemies:

> Then suddenly, the merciful God brought salvation to his people, and caused those who ventured against Him to leave the temple in shame. For in a terrifying and astounding vision an angel was seen by them, riding on a great and terrible horse. And he was dressed in terrifying armour, and through the great vehemence of the clanging of his armour was causing the mind of Heliodorus to be disturbed (fol. 20b).

The above examples clearly demonstrate that John chose to construct a theological argument using the form of a historical genre.

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[414] The belief in such divine interventions is not restricted to Syriac authors. The historian Socrates describes how angels appeared to certain persons who were traveling from Bithynia to Constantinople and said to them, "Tell the people not be alarmed, but pray to God and be assured that the Romans would be conquerors; for they said that they themselves were appointed by God to defend them." Socrates also reports how the distinguished general Helion was appointed by emperor Theodosius to negotiate a treaty with the Persians. The Persian king, however, was persuaded by his army not to sign the treaty, and was about to engage in battle with the Romans. Socrates observe that here the Roman would have suffered a severe defeat, but that "Divine Providence so ordered it, that another division of the Roman army under Procopius a general emerged from behind a certain hill and perceiving their comrades in danger, attacked the Persians in the rear." See "The Ecclesiatical History of Socrates Scholasticus" in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church II*, revised by A. C. Zenos, (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), Book VII, ch. 18.

4.2 **Theology**

Not surprisingly, theology is the dominant sub-genre in *Resh Melle*. In fact, all works of the church fathers were written from a theological perspective. Within its genre of universal history, *Resh Melle* offers a theological interpretation of many biblical and historical events, including contemporary ones, where God actively intervenes in the salvific economy of the history of mankind. We will now consider John's theological ideas in a number of key areas of Christian dogma.

4.2.1 God

Christian doctrine teaches that there is only one God who is eternal and the creator of visible and invisible things.[415] It emphasizes the 'Oneness' of God in his 'Triune' being: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Throughout *Resh Melle* John comments on the special relationship that exists between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and which is clearly manifested in the books of the New Testament. Thus, as John observes, one learns about this relationship when Jesus declares, "I and my Father are one" (fol. 103b),[416] and in His statement to Philip that "[w]hoever has seen me has seen the Father" (fol. 103b).[417] For John, Jesus was proclaimed by the angels to be the Saviour, the Lord, and the Christ (fol. 119b).[418] When He restores the sight of the blind man by using mud he exercises the same creative skill that He used at Creation (fols. 104a-b).[419] This special relationship emphasized in the books of the New Testament will be further explored below as we explore the topics of the Trinity, Christology and Soteriology.

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[415] As stated in the Nicene Creed, 325 A.D. (which is included in the liturgy of the Church of the East). See, *The Liturgy of the Church of the East,* ed. Joseph Qelaytha, (Mosul: Assyrian Press, 1928), 15-6.
[416] See John 10:30.
[417] See John 14:9.
[418] See Luke 12:11.
[419] Compare the restoring of the blind man's sight by Jesus in John 9:5-7 with the formation of Adam in Genesis 2:7.

For John, God is one and exists in all things and everywhere: "For God exists in all things and beyond all things, yet it cannot be said how He exists ... If God exists in all things, [then] how is it possible that He could be known? It is said that, much more than anywhere else, He exists in the mind, since it is His dwelling place" (fol. 68a).[420] In his argument concerning how it is possible to understand and believe in the real existence of the invisible God, John introduces the motif of body and soul:

> If the body perceives the soul which dwells in it, the mind, too, is able to perceive God, who dwells in it. But if a creature cannot perceive its fellow creature, how much more will a creature be unable to perceive its Creator. And if the soul exists in the body, but is not limited [while] in the body, how much more does God exist in his creation completely without limitation (fol. 68a).[421]

John's main argument is that God truly exists in and outside the world. The emphasis here on the 'outside' clearly implies that God is not a part of the creation, and His presence within the world should not be interpreted to mean that He came into existence just as visible things had. Rather, it signifies His close relationship with and love for His creation, even though His existence is eternal and is beyond and above what He has created.

Throughout his work John uses many theological terms to describe the nature of God and the magnitude of His love towards all his creations and especially toward mankind. The following terms in particular reveal God's economy in the history of human salvation: *ṭaybutha* ('grace'; 113 times); *raḥme* or *m-raḥmanutha* ('mercy'; 88 times); and *bṭilutha* ('care', 'diligence'; 33 times). Concerning *ṭaybutha* he wrote, "This is the primary *Grace* that cannot be repaid ...[that He created] us when we did not exist" (fol. 4b). Elsewhere he describes this act of bringing everything into being as a "great *Grace* full of mercy" (fol. 38b), a precious gift of life, for "our lives are given to us through *Grace*" (fol. 46a). Grace is attributed to the 'Oneness' of God (e.g. "It is a free *Grace* that God has prepared as a gift to the nations"; fol. 74b), or to each person of the Trinity (e.g. "the *Grace* of the Holy Spirit", fol. 50a; or: "this mercy and *Grace* were given by God to the race of Mankind through His only Son Jesus Christ", fol. 91a).

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[420] Ephrem expresses a similar thought: "For God is not distant from us but He dwells within our mind," see Luise Abramowski and Alan Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts I,* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 221.

[421] The same analogy is seen in *the Bishop's Creed of the Persian land which was demanded by Kosroes in 612 A.D.* See *SO*, Syr. 562-598. Also see, Luise Abramowski and Alan Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts I,* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 166.

John describes God as "a *merciful* Father" who cares for the needs of mankind (fol. 9a). When they were oppressed at the time of the Maccabeans, "[a]ll the Jews turned and cried out to the *merciful* God so He might come to their aid" (fol. 36a). In another place, John states that God would reconcile Himself with mankind through "the *mercy* that He enacted" in the manifestation of Jesus Christ (fol. 154b). John notes the contrast between human disobedience towards God and God's love: "The excellent *mercy* and providence that God had revealed to mankind" (fol. 19a) is also the divine mercy that had compelled the angels to serve mankind even though the latter had gone astray (fol. 94a). John also illustrates God's care for humanity by emphasizing His role as teacher:

> [W]e have shown in brief how He began by forming us and [how He] led us little by little like a father with his son, and like a teacher with his disciple, and how He is going to complete [another] chapter [of teaching] with us (fol. 155a).

All these expressions reveal God's abundant love towards mankind without condition.

Concerning God's diligence, John reminds his readers that in earlier *memre* in *Resh Melle*, "[w]e also demonstrated how the evil demons, for their part, are placed in opposition against both themselves and the whole race of mankind, and how much diligence the Merciful One has concerning this, not allowing the demons to plunder our freedom (fol. 82b). According to John, God's mercy is also revealed through "the diligence of the Angels' towards mankind, who had strayed away from Him" (fol. 93b).

In Book IX, it is stated that before the coming of Christ, the nations (‘*amme*) were at some distance from “the knowledge of the truth” (*idaʿtha dashrara*), and very often, according to the prophets, even the Israelites (i.e. “the people”, ‘*amma*) rebelled against the knowledge of the truth of the One God.[422] John briefly discusses how the Greeks worshipped such deities as Kronos (fol. 83b), Zeus (fol. 84a), Dionysius (fol. 84b), Artemis (fol. 85a), and Apollo (fol. 85a). Likewise, the ancient Egyptians worshipped Isis (fol. 85b), the Persians the Sun and Fire (fol. 45b), and the Arabs ʿAnzi (fol. 45b). In the Mesopotamian sphere (i.e. among the Assyrians and Babylonians), he mentions the cult of Tamuzu (fols. 45b, 86b) and the Babylonian Dragon (fol. 45b).[423] John does not attribute this diversity of worship to human free will but to the influence of demons, who have caused mankind to err and worship visible things instead of the living Creator (fol. 45a). Particular demons cause a variety of particular errors in human minds (fol. 41b).

As seen from the above, John does not offer a comprehensive philosophical analysis of God (but see section 4.7 below), and relies mainly on expressions derived from the Bible and liturgy.

4.2.2 Creation

In Christian theology, creation is the notion of bringing things which did not exist or were not formed into being and existence, and God is the Creator of all things, whether visible or invisible.[424] Thus the Bible clearly denounces polytheism and declares that there are no other gods beside the Lord God (see Ex 20:2-3), who formed the heavens and earth (Isa 45:18), and whose glory is declared in the heavens (Ps. 19:1).[425] John's cosmology is undoubtedly biblical, based on the six-day creation of the heavens and earth and all of the living creatures (fols. 3b-7a). Concerning the biblical creation, John considers it "part of God's history of grace, since all has been created for the benefit and service of mankind, and not to cause harm or injury" (fol. 4a). He echoes the Psalmist and St. Paul in saying that creation reflects "the greatness of the Designer's thought" and gives praise to Him (fol. 6a). In a similar way, Narsai, in two of his *memre* entitled "On Creation", calls God "the Designer" (*'umana*) who is actively involved in the six-day creation.[426] John refutes some "ancients" who believed in the divinity of creation, and argues that God through his own will created the visible world. Others had argued that the creation had existed eternally with God (fol. 124b). A similar point is made by St. Basil: "The wise men among the Greeks ... erred and said that the world is consubstantial with God. They did not admit that it was created by him."[427] For John, there is a cause for every motion, and there is a chain of causes until one reaches the first cause: "For there is no cause of the Cause of all: there is no further creator for the One who created all. If you ascend as far as possible, you will find One Cause of all causes: God, the creator of all that has come into being, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (fol. 92a).

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[422] See folios 12a-b; 15b; 62b; 83a.

[423] The Babylonian Dragon must be related to the mythodological figure which is depicted on the famous excavated glazed bricks of the ancient Gate of Ishtar. In one hymn Ephrem (306-373 A.D.) lists such Mesopotamian deities as *Tammuz*, *Ishtar*, and *Bel*, still worshiped in his own days: “The Word (*meltheh*) of the Father is insulted (but) *Kamosh* (ܟܡܘܫ) is again honoured; the holy Son is mocked (but) *Tammuz* is loved and cherished; The Lord Most High is despised and neglected (but) *Ishtar* (ܐܣܬܪܐ; *‘Estera*) is celebrated everywhere. Lo! The Heavenly [One] is treated with contempt (while) Baal (ܒܥܠܐ; *baʿla*) is honoured with fear.” See Ephrem on Palm Sunday, Sermo III, 433-440 in *Des Heiligen Ephraem Des Syrers*: Sermones II, ed. Edmund Beck, (Louvain: CORPUS, 1970), vol. 311, 65.

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[424] The Niceane Creed (325 A.D.).

[425] The above statements are clearly attested in the Niceane Creed formula (325 A.D.) which declares in brief the core of the Christian teaching. Thus, it confirms the Oneness of God who is confessed in Trinitarian formula, the created of all things that are visibil and invisible, and being the sole living God.

[426] "O commandment! Which by its decreed voice, action came into being; O Skillful/Designer, whose hint laboured Him through every thing that He made." See "On the Formation of the Universe," in *Homilies of Mar Narsai II*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), fol. 3b. Again in a second *memra* he wrote: "Behold! The Skillful one who adorns all, His will is dominant in all; from things and out of nothing [He] is able to create every thing;" Ibid. fol. 26a.

[427] Basil of Caesarea, *The Syriac Version of the Hexaemeron,* ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson, (Louvain: CORPUS, 1995), vols. 550-551, (I:7).

John's cosmology is not clearly expressed like that of his contemporary west-Syrian author and scholar, Jacob of Edessa (630-708 A.D.).[428] He argues against certain views but fails to mention his sources. For example, no one knows where he might have encountered the idea that the earth is greater than the sun when he says that "the sun, as great as it is, is no match for even one of the seas. Even if it were greater than one of the great seas, what could come close to the magnitude of the unmeasured depths which surround all the [planet] earth, which is like an island in the centre?" (fol. 6a). By contrast, Jacob of Edessa argues against those think that they can give a specific figure for the size of the sun (e.g. 27 or 18 times greater than the earth): "[I]ndividuals from our region (*d-dartha dilan*), quite wisely, knowledgably and trustfully said that [the sun] by its great sphere surpasses the earth by many measures which are not few."[429] When John interprets the verse which says that "God separated the light from the darkness" (Gen 1:4), he argues that the meaning is that "God has separated and granted time to each of them, so that they would not infringe on each other in a disorderly manner, thus demonstrating the skill of His work" (fols. 4b-5a). Jacob, on the other hand, provides an astronomical explanation of how the light is spread upon the earth depending on the position of the sun above (ܠܥܠ; *lʿel*) the earth. Likewise, darkness (shadows of the bodies of the earth)[430] occurs when the position of the sun is below (*l-taḥt*) the earth.[431]

Although John does not display any knowledge of technical astronomy in *Resh Melle*, he does see great meaning in celestial events. For example, John states that three solar eclipses had occurred since the Theopaschite Controversy in 533 A.D.[432] In each case they are a sign of the wrath of God, and here he is in line with all ancient and medieval authors, who took celestial phenomena as omens. In a more general way, he understands natural cycles as expressions of God's care for Creation:

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[428] John clearly glypmses to another unknown work by him when he says: "For at the beginning, the earth could not be seen and was not fashioned, as it is written. For mountains, heights, valleys, and streams, together with other [features] that were necessary for the earth to have, so that finally it would possess them where they were fashioned. And this has been said by us concerning them in another *book* and it is not necessary to repeat it again" (fol. 5a).

[429] See Jacob of Edessa, *Iacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron*, ed. I.-B. Chabot, (Paris: CORPUS, 1928), 156.

[430] See Jacob of Edessa, *Iacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron*, ed. I.-B. Chabot, (Paris: CORPUS, 1928), 151.

[431] Jacob of Edessa, *Iacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron*, ed. I.-B. Chabot, (Paris: CORPUS, 1928), 144.

> For we began [our account] from the beginning of the Creation, and demonstrated everything that God enacted in all generations toward the race of Mankind. Because of this, all things were formed. Because of this a variety of elements [exists]. Because of this an opposition of mixtures [exists]. Because of this, [there is a] variety of species. Because of this, [there is] a procession of years, months, times, weeks, days and hours. Because of this [there is] a circling (ܟܪܘܟܝܐ; *krukhya*) of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Because of this [there is] the blowing of winds and the changing of the seasons... (fol. 127a).

John goes beyond the physical creation and talks of the 'new creation' which God begins to create through Jesus Christ. The conception of Jesus through Mary the virgin (*bthulta*) and that of John the Baptist despite the old age (*saybutha*) and barrenness (*ʿaqrutha*) of Elizabeth are both described as being "above the law of nature" (fol. 95b). Likewise, when John explains to his companion Sabrishoʿ all the good benefits which were gained through the coming of Christ, he reminds him of Paul's saying that we are raised up to all this greatness "not through deeds lest no man should boast. For we are His own creation, but also a new creation, not through Adam but we are created through Jesus Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand and before the beginning of the world, that we may walk in them" (fol. 100b).[433] In a similar vein, John contrasts the physical creation and the spiritual creation: "For just as Adam became the leader and firstborn for our entry into this world, likewise our Saviour Christ became the firstborn, the leader, and the cause of our entry into the new world" (fol. 75b).

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[432] The Church of the East had firmly rejected the 'theopaschite formula' which Justinian had proclaimed in this year.

[433] See Eph 2:9-10.

In conclusion, one can say that John stays close to the Bible in discussing the creation, but adds a theological dimension when he talks about the new creation, drawing much on the epistles of Paul.

4.2.3 Anthropology

Christian doctrine concerning humanity can only be understood in the context of salvation history: God's creation of mankind, the fall of humanity through sin, redemption through Jesus Christ, and eternal life in the future Kingdom of God.[434] A number of themes relevant to this doctrine in *Resh Melle* will now be explored.

4.2.3.1 Glory

John identifies a special intention and a shift in the command when God created Mankind, “Let us make “human” (*nasha*) in our image according to our likeness” (fols. 6b, 91b).[435] While John gives no further details on whether Adam was created or formed out of ‘four elements’, he however states “that *through four* everything is established” (*wawyad arbʿa methqayyam kul*),[436] an expression almost certainly referring to ‘the four elements,’ that is earth, water, fire, and air. He makes use of the ‘four elements’ in another context, calling them “the four principal elements” (*wad-arbʿa asṭukse awahaye*). Here, however, this phrase is not used to signify ‘creation’ but comprehensiveness (fol. 132b). Thus, for John the human being has a special status within the creation of God; he is claimed to be the heir of the whole creation (fol. 7a), the only rational being amongst all physical natures (fol. 8a), and the only creature praised by God so as to assign for him a rational soul such as the angels are (fol. 8a). Because of Adam's exalted image, he was so greatly honoured that height and depth and their contents were subjected to him (fol. 6b). In illustrating this honour which the first man enjoyed, John demonstrates how God continued His six-days labour to create and form this ‘expansive house’ (i.e. the world) filled with all good things for Adam (fol. 6b). Ephrem and Narsai also wrote about such a glorious state which Adam had enjoyed before his sinning and fall.[437]

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[434] Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 134.
[435] Gen. 1:26.
[436] See BL, fol. 5a.

4.2.3.2 Sin

In Christian theology, sin is defined as a human act which separates humanity from God, a consequence of rebellion and a rejection of the divine will. It can be pardoned through repentance and God’s forgiveness.[438] The first occurrence of sin is associated with Adam, who, according the Genesis 3, ate the forbidden fruit in the middle of the Garden of Eden. John makes use of Pauline concepts in his description of the fall: “Because of the transgression of the first man’s commandment, sin entered the world, and through sin, death. These two evil tyrants ruled over all of mankind’s nature. Thus, the more grievous sin grew the more the yoke of death was firmly set upon mankind” (fol. 93b).[439] According to John, the consequence of sin is not an immediate physical death, but an immediate moral death which separates a person from God.[440] Thus Abel, who had committed no sin, died first,[441] while his father Adam lived on much longer (fol. 9b). John reasons that Abel’s early death testifies that God created humanity ‘mortal’ from the beginning. He emphasizes, however, that it was God’s intention to use death as a punishment: “God made death attack them whenever they transgressed [His] command, so that

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[437] See Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990); also see “On the creation of Adam and Eve and on [their] transgression of the command” in *Homilies of Mar Narsai II*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), fols. 31a-41a.

[438] McKim, 260.

[439] See Romans 5:12.

[440] See section 4.2.11 for further discussion of the relationship between sin and death.

[441] Narsai states that “Abel became *bukhra* “first-born” of that [God’s] curse;” *The Hymns of Mar Narsai I*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), fol. 170a.

He might fix in them fear of His laws and hatred for sin" (fol. 9b). Although God takes no pleasure in temples and sacrifices, through offerings and gifts a person can demonstrate obedience to His commandments and conformity to His will (fol. 14b).

John also identifies various types of sins. A person commits a sin by breaking one of God's commandments, but a person also sins when he alienates himself from the worship of God. There is individual sin, but also collective sin associated with a group or a nation. Thus, as a nation, the Israelites were condemned by God through His prophets when they sinned against Him by worshipping other deities (fols. 14b, 15b, 29a, 78b); this sin was considered an act of adultery. Likewise, the prophet Jonah was sent by God to condemn the Ninevites for their collective sin (fols. 14b, 79b-81a).

4.2.3.3 Redemption

The root of the term *purqana* in Syriac means 'to buy back'. John uses the term in this basic sense when he says, "We should all acknowledge our debts to God, which we can never pay back, for He created us when we did not exist" (fol. 4b). More typically, *purqana* has a specific theological meaning denoting salvation through Christ from the bondage of sin. Throughout *Resh Melle*, John shows how mankind continued to rebel against God's dispensation, rejecting His grace and remaining distant from His love. God, however, continued His salvific intervention throughout human history. A related Syriac root, *zbn*, is used to denote God's redemption of mankind in the Syriac translation of Paul's statement: "[For] God sent his Son, born of a woman, under the law, in order to buy back [*nezban*, i.e. 'redeem'] those who were under [the Law], so that we may receive [the status of being God's] adopted children" (Gal. 4:4-5; fol. 93b). A little later in *Resh Melle* John again quotes Paul, combining together several verses from Romans and 1Corinthians: "In my conscious mind I am a slave of the Law of God, but in my flesh, I am a slave of the Law of sin [Rom. 7:25b] into which I am sold as a slave [Rom. 7:14]. Thus I no longer do the things that I desire but I do what I hate [Rom. 7:15]...Therefore, thanks be to God, who gives us victory over these things through our Lord Jesus Christ [1Cor. 15:57]" (fol. 96b). John praises God's intervention through His Son Jesus Christ who, through his victorious death on the Cross, brought redemption and liberation from the bondage of sin and death. It is important to note, however, that John sees the temptation of Christ by Satan in the wilderness as an important event in the working out of human redemption:

> Cease from this [activity], however, since from this point it is the time for the fulfilment of the prophecy that every knee should bend to God, and every tongue confess His name (Is 45:23; 49:18, see Rom 14:11; Php 2:10). Behold, it has now been made known to you that from me and through me this [fulfillment] will have its beginning.' Thus [he said], "Get behind me [Satan]" (Mt 4:10; cf. Mt 16:23), that is, 'You are dismissed from the authority which you were convinced that [you had].' When our Lord was victorious in all these [ways] through the power of the Holy Spirit and of God the Word within him, behold, "the angels came and were ministering to him" (Mt 4:11). But Satan departed from him temporarily, as the evangelist demonstrates (see Mt 4:11). It is known [to us], however, that he was [now] looking for a different way [to defeat Him], namely, death. For since the deceiver had been condemned, and the Law had been abolished and Sin had been weakened, what was left for [Satan] except [to contrive] the death [of our Lord].

4.2.3.4 Eternal Life

Christian theology considers 'eternal life' as the state of enjoying the everlasting life that God would grant through Jesus Christ after eschatology, in line with the Gospel of John which states that, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). John's concept of 'eternal life' is wholly biblical: The 'kingdom of heaven' is prefigured by the 'promised land' (fol. 59b) and the crossing of the Jordan (Jos 13-14) symbolizes Baptism through which the baptized inherit the kingdom of heaven (fol. 60a) first proclaimed in Jesus ministry (fol. 65b). Just as through divine salvation the crossing of the Jordan was made possible, so divine salvation librates humanity from death into the promised kingdom of heaven. John exploits the familiar Adam-Jesus typology, and writes “lest he (Adam) stretches his hand and takes also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (fol. 9a),[442] “Mary gave birth to Christ the living fruit and life-giving” (fol. 95a). Here John paraphrases Paul in saying: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, likewise through one man Jesus Christ, justice, righteousness, peace and everlasting life will rule. And on account that we all die through Adam since we became participants of his [mortal] nature, likewise we will all live through Christ as we are [to become] of his own nature” (fols. 95b-96a).[443] The notion of ‘eternal life’ is finally clearly explained by John who looks to Jesus’ words who had testified, “And these are the eternal life, that they should acknowledge you, the only God of truth, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (fol. 92b).[444] John also emphasizes that Jesus will bring those who eat his Body into eternal life (fol. 107a).[445] The Syriac liturgy is replete with biblical prototypes and this seems to be the source of John’s inspiration.

4.2.4 Angels and Demons

The Syriac terms denoting angelic beings are *malakha* (plural *malakhe*) and *ʿira* (plural ʿire), and both are biblical Aramaic in form. In his account of creation, John describes angels in the following way:

> On the first day God created heaven, earth, angels, waters, fire, air, darkness and light. Thus the angels remained in silence for twelve hours until the light emerged, and then they were awakened (ܐܬܬܥܝܪܘ). Therefore the beginning of their awakening came through knowledge and the glory of God. For the arrival and existence of the light does strengthen the perception of perceivers, and sets knowledge in motion among the learned (fol. 4b).

This same belief is found in the canon for the second psalm (Psalm 91) in the *Festival Morning Prayer* of the Church of the East: “The spiritual [beings] glorified You *when* You created that unrestrained light. They realized that [the One] who created that light is the One who created them [too].”[446] John adds, however, that like the rest of creation, the angels were enhanced in their nature after they were created:

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[442] See Genesis 3:22.
[443] See Rom 5:12-13, 21.
[444] See Jn 17:3.
[445] John 6:54.

> If a person investigates seriously, however, [he will see that] it is not the earth alone after its creation that has received assembly and further decoration, but also the dome of the sky, the light, the air, the darkness, the fire, the waters, the angels, and the heavens themselves (fol. 5a).
>
> These decorations and fashionings that all the natures received were after they received their being. Let those who are rational recognize that the one who has decorated and assembled these natures at the end [of his creation] is the same one who brought them into being at the beginning when they did not exist. Because even the intellectual natures [angels], when they were created at the beginning, remained uninformed, and little by little they were elevated towards knowledge (fol. 5b).

The above passage shows that the angels were as imperfect as Adam since both are creatures, but, unlike Adam, the angels are immortal spiritual beings (fol. 63a) whose food consists of “spiritual knowledge and divine revelations” (fol. 8b). For John, God’s grace acts through the holy angels when they prevent demons from causing harm or injury to mankind (fol. 39a). The angels are addressed as ‘*emre tammime* “gentle lambs” (fol. 43a), who rejoice when sinners repent (fol. 43a). At times angels act as messengers manifesting a divine revelation to mankind, such as the angel who appeared to Moses (fol. 51a). In a similar way, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary (fol. 95a) and to Zakariah (fol. 119a). When angels had carried the message of the good news to the shepherds, they manifested their joyful participation in God’s plan for the salvation of Mankind. The joy of the angel Gabriel when he received the divine revelation to be delivered to mankind is thus described by John: “For when the holy angel Gabriel received the revelation, he caused it to shine forth with unspeakable joy, and announced peace and hope to his [fellow angels], saying, ‘Reconciliation has been accomplished!’ The [angels] began to dance and celebrate, to clap [their] hands and stomp [their feet] with divine praises and sanctus-shoutings. But [they celebrated] in secret, and not yet openly” (fol. 94b).

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[446] *Ḥudra*, vols. I-III, 100. ܒܕܡܘܬ ܚܘܫܟܐ ܬܪܝ ܗ ܠܡܠܐ ܩܕܡ ܚܙܝܢܘܗܝ: ܘܐܪܓܫܘ ܡܢܗ ܒܪܝܗ ܒܪܘܝܐ ܕܒܪܐ ܢܘܗܪܐ. See “On Beginning and the Being of God” in *Homilies of Mar Narsai II*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), 18b.

For John, the angels at the time of Jesus' resurrection and ascension are described as wearing white garments, a colour which reflects their calm, peaceful, and joyful nature (fols. 116a-b). Before the time of Christ, however, they appeared as warriors carrying weapons of destruction (fols. 117a-b). Since angels have ranks, those mentioned by John may not always be the same spiritual beings, but John is silent on this question.[447]

Resh Melle speaks more about demons than about angels. This is probably because the core message of John's work is about God's grace and love expressed in the economy of human salvation, which however is met with human resistance and alienation from God. The standard Syriac term for 'demon' is *sheda*, which corresponds to the Greek term *daimōn* ('spirit') as understood by Christian authors.[448] The term *sheda* comes from the root *shd'* ('to throw'): the demons were 'thrown out' because of their rebellion against God (fol. 59b). A demon is an evil spirit (*ruḥa bishta*) that unceasingly resists the will of God. Demons originally were angels of light but they became rebellious (fol. 101b). Their rebellion was due to their pride and envy, and when they were thrown out of heaven, they fell down into the abyss (fol. 42a).[449] At first, all angels were in harmony with God. Nonetheless, with the creation of Man, they became divided:

> But when they heard that awe-inspiring voice [say], "Let us make humankind in our image according to our likeness,"[450] they then became conscious that the heir had arrived. Some of them rejoiced at his arrival while others were filled with fire of envy against him (fol. 6b).

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[447] According to Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. 500 A.D.), the nine orders of angels are: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Powers, authorities, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. See "Angels" by William S. Babcock in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, eds. Everett Ferguson, Michael P. McHugh, and Frederick W. Norris, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990), 38-42.

[448] For some Syriac authors, the name 'Satan' is associated with the verb *sṭ'* ("to go astray, deviate"); see for ex. Paul Bedjan, *Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. III (1907; Gorgias Press, 2006), 127:13 (*memra* 71). Theodore bar Koni provides similar explanation concerning these three terms: *daywa* (ܕܝܘܐ); *sheda* (ܫܐܕܐ); *saṭana* (ܣܛܢܐ). See Theodore bar Koni, *Liber scholiorum I-II*, ed. Addai Scher, (Paris: CORPUS, 1910, 1912), bk. 2, 78.

[449] ܒܗܢܐ ܡܪܘܕܐ ܕܢܦܩ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܕܐܪܡ: ܘܦܘܫܩܗ ܪܡܐ ܒܕܡܘܬ ܒܪܩܐ ܡܢ ܫܘܠܛܢܗ see Narsai, "On the forming of the Creation" in *Homilies of Mar Narsai II*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), 12b.

[450] Gen. 1:26.

The figure of Satan[451] receives particular attention in *Resh Melle*, which uses the biblical term *'akhelqarṣa* (ܐܟ݂ܠܩܪܨܐ ; 'Slanderer') twenty-six times to denote him.[452] Several other terms are used by John to refer to the Evil One, including *maṭe ʿyana* (ܡܛܥܝܢܐ ; 'Deceiver'; used twice), *bar-awdana* (ܒܪ ܐܒ݂ܕܢܐ ; 'Son of Perdition'; used three times), and 'Antichrist' (ܐܢܛܝܟܪܝܣܛܘܣ ; used twice).[453] Satan is described as refusing to offer thanks to the Lord for all the good things and the glory which God had given him. Instead, he revolted in arrogance and tried to take the place of his Creator. He destroyed God's image in mankind, causing it to fall into idolatry. John observes that it was quite appropriate that Satan was "thrown [down]" (*eshtdi*) from heaven like a flash of lightning (fols. 42b-43a).[454] John describes how the demons tricked mankind into going astray (fol. 46b) and worshipping various idols that the Slanderer had introduced (fol. 45a). He points out that the legion of demons mentioned in Luke 8:30-31 begged Jesus not to send them back into the abyss (fol. 44a). For John, demons are divided into three orders "according to what is said," which probably refers to writings of ascetic fathers who often describe their own struggle with demons:

> Also, they say that [demons] are divided into three orders, and that each individual [demon] through its order demonstrates the goal of his evil will by the function that has been entrusted to him. The first order compels [mankind] toward error and the worship of idols. The second order implants the enticements and allurements of desires. And the third order brings diseases and various temptations upon mankind (fol. 43b).

Thus, mankind began to worship various created things or things that they had made, which led to polytheism. John illustrates his point with the example of Pharaoh, who was amazed to hear that there was a living God. Thus Pharaoh asked, "Who is God? I do not know God!" (Ex 5:2; fol. 49a).

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[451] For Syriac authors, the name 'Satan' may have been associated with the verb *sṭ'* ("to go astray, deviate").

[452] He also uses the term *mekhalqrṣa(e)* (ܡܐܟ݂ܠܩܪܨܐ ; 'accusation') four times (fols. 31b, 80b, 87b and 153b).

[453] See 4.3 for further discussion of these terms.

[454] Luke 10:18, reads: "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning."

Others, John observes, believe that this world arose from two principles, one good and one evil, which implies the existence of two mutually opposed gods. According to this view, all human actions fall either into a good or a bad category, and may be directly attributed to these two gods. But for John the existence in this world of various actions should not be attributed to such gods (fol. 86b).

4.2.5 Soteriology

As indicated above, the Syriac term *purqana* is used to denote God's plan to save mankind, and John's concept of it is not only biblical but also rooted in early Syriac literature.[455] The goal of salvation is to bring mankind back to its original state of glory which Adam experienced before his sin and fall. Adam became rebellious and disobeyed the commandment of God, his Creator (fol. 6b). Consequently, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden (fol. 9a).[456] God's ultimate response to this disobedience was through the sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ. Following the steps of Ephrem and other Church fathers, John identifies several biblical prototypes of Christ's sacrifice, including Abraham who proceeds to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen 22:1-14), and prototypes of Christ's act of salvation, including the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt (Ex 14) and the salvation of the Ninevites at the hand of Jonah (Jonah 1-4). For John there is a reason that God allowed His people, the Israelites, to be taken captive and to mingle with other nations, as when Moses and his people lived in the land of the Egyptians, when Jonah the prophet went to the city of Nineveh in Assyria, and when Daniel and his people lived in captivity in Babylon. These events took place not for the Israelites to learn the ways of the Gentiles, but so that by mingling themselves among other nations, God's name would also be proclaimed amongst the Gentiles (see fols. 12a, 15a, 16a-b, 18a, 33a-b, 36b, etc.). It was through Moses that God brought salvation to his people, bringing them out of Egypt into the wilderness (fols. 11b-12a), for which they responded by praising His name for the miracles He had performed (Ex 14-15). God, through Joshua, led the Israelites across the river Jordan into the 'promised land' (fols. 13a, 59b).

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[455] Other terms associated with the theme of salvation include *bṭilutha* ('providence'), *mraḥmanutha* ('mercy'), and *ṭaybutha* ('Grace'), as discussed above.

[456] Gen 3:23.

John explores the deeper meaning behind Jonah's mission to the city of Nineveh: it was so that he might deliver God's message of repentance and salvation. John's account highlights God's broad plan of salvation, which covers all nations. Jonah is a prototype of Christ who accomplished God's comprehensive plan of salvation: "He commanded Jonah, outside of the [normal] custom, to abandon the effort of correcting the Israelites, and to hasten to Nineveh and become the preacher of truth for the turning back of the Gentiles [to God]" (fol. 80a). The promises of God which had been conveyed by His prophets were fulfilled through the coming of Christ: "What more, then, [would be done by] the One rich in mercy? Henceforth, neither through angels nor prophets, nor by visions and revelations of all sorts, but rather by his own hands He enacted our salvation, as with our formation in the beginning" (fol. 94a; see also fols. 27b-28a; 36b-37a).

With the coming of Christ, this salvation is universal in scope. As John states,

> [B]ecause of the vision that [Peter] saw, [the apostles] understood and were convinced that God had also granted the Gentiles repentance... When... the gate was opened for the return of the Gentiles, the holy apostles, each one of them, soon arrived at the region or land or city that was allotted to him, equipped and armed with the sword [lit. 'weapon'] of the Holy Spirit (fol. 130b).

John's reference to an 'open gate' is obviously connected with the Great Commission of Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew, who commanded his apostles to make disciples among all the nations.[457] Likewise, John cites the example of Paul's conversion and commissioning to emphasize the universality of the gospel:

> Afterwards, the apostles were dispersed among all the Gentiles in order to make disciples and to baptize according to the word of our Lord. The appointing of Paul greatly strengthened them, this one who was set apart by Grace from before the foundations of the world [were laid] for the mission to the Gentiles: "This one has been prepared to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings" (Acts 9:15; fol. 130b).

Thus, the experiences of these two major apostles demonstrate that the salvation brought by Christ was not limited to the Jews, but was universal in scope.

John also states that at the time of Jesus' ascension, the great commission was given to his disciple to go to all nations and evangelize them. In this regard John elaborates on Jesus' discourse to his disciples by saying:

> [...] Go therefore, make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit [Mt 28:19]. For He intends to say: 'I have chosen you and drawn you to myself. All this time I have been with you, and have taught you the entire path of the fear of God. I established you in all my [teachings], for no other purpose than to make you preachers and teachers of [my gospel] to all nations. Go therefore and make them disciples, that is, make them obedient to me, and in addition, baptize them – not in a strange way, but in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Now, concerning the Father, you have no need for me to teach you who He is, since you know that He is the Maker and the Lord of all, who was ignorantly disregarded by mankind, and the worship which is due to Him alone they offered to the work of His hands. Yet, you should not abandon them! As I have said to you: Go to my own and make disciples of them, since God has caused the ages of ignorance to pass away from the earth, and He teaches in this time that every person from every place should return to the knowledge of the truth. It is also the time for the prophecy to be fulfilled, that [which says], "I am alive, says the Lord, and to me every knee shall bow and every tongue acknowledge me" [Is 45:23; Ro 14:11]. Also remember what David said concerning me, "Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your dominion" [Ps 2:8]. You have also read what Hosea says: "I will call those who are not my people, my people" [Hosea 2:23]. Thus, you should not be disgusted by them, [even though] they will persecute you, stone you, mock you, and kill you, since I am sending you to the Gentiles like lambs into the midst of wolves [see Lk 10:3]. Therefore, you should not grow weary, since you may recall my own [experiences], how much I had suffered for no reason but the salvation of mankind. Therefore, you also must suffer on their behalf. Urge them! Entice them! Cause them to return! Teach them! Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. For you know the Father. I taught you concerning myself that I am the Son. And behold, I am also sending you the Holy Spirit so that you may know Him, that One about Whom you should not think anything but that He proceeds from the Father [see Jn 15:26] and is of the same nature as Him (fols. 115a-b).

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[457] See Matthew 28:19-20.

4.2.6 Baptism

Baptism (ܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ ; *maʿmoditha*) is regarded as a sacrament by most Christian churches. During the baptismal ceremony, an infant or an adult is immersed in the baptismal font by a priest or a bishop who recites a Trinitarian formula. John explores the importance of Christian baptism in several ways: he lists Old Testament types of baptism to demonstrate that the mystery of baptism was prefigured in the Old Testament; he answers a question asked by many Christians, namely, ‘Why did Jesus willingly submit to baptism?’; he explains baptism as a regeneration; he discusses the spiritual gifts which are bestowed on the baptized person.

4.2.6.1 Types of baptism in the Old Testament

In his discussion of Old Testament types for baptism, John follows the example of Paul, who said that “[t]he Law contained the shadow of what is to come, but not the substance of these matters” (Col 2:17; fol. 58b). Thus, for John, Jesus in the New Testament is like Moses, and many events which took place during the time of Moses were fulfilled during Jesus’ ministry. Thus Moses, who delivered the people of Israel from Pharoah and from their slavery in Egypt, prefigures Jesus, who brought salvation to mankind by delivering them from Satan, to whom they were subject (fol. 60a). Moses brought salvation to the people of Israel when they crossed the Red Sea, while Pharoah and his forces were destroyed by the waters of the sea (fol. 60a). For John, baptismal water is prefigured by the sea through which the Israelites passed, but Jesus settles the baptized ones in the vast plain of his commandments (fol. 60a) rather than in the wilderness of Exodus. As the Law prohibits the uncircumcised to participate in eating from the lamb of Passover, the un-baptized have no right to participate in eating form *peṣḥa dilan* “Our

Passover" (fol. 58b).[458] Joshua also prefigures the person of Jesus the Saviour, an association partially facilitated by their names, for in Syriac, Jesus is spelled Ishoʿ (ܐܝܫܘܥ) and Joshua is spelled Ishoʿ-barnun (ܐܝܫܘܥ ܒܪܢܘܢ). Moses brought the Israelites to the Jordan River, but he did not enter the 'promised land', unlike Joshua, who entered it along with the Israelites after fighting many nations (fols. 59b-60a). For John, Moses here represents the Old Covenant while Joshua's role in bringing the people into the land represents the New Covenant:

> For Joshua represented Jesus our Saviour... who has caused us to receive an indestructible inheritance, which was prepared through the prior knowledge of God. But Joshua did not bring them rest. It is clear that even after they entered and inherited [the land] they had no rest. For at one time they were subjugated by the Philistines, at certain times by others, [such as] the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and many others. Our Lord Christ, however, has totally destroyed all spiritual nations, our adversaries. He granted us an indestructible inheritance, from which they were cast out because of their wickedness (fols. 59b-60a).

John also sees the mystery of baptism prefigured in the account of the prophet Elisha who healed Naaman the commander of the Aramean king (2 Kings 5:19). The prophet asks Naaman to go and wash seven times in the Jordan to be cleansed from his leprosy (v. 10), and Naaman, after washing seven times, is cured and his flesh becomes like that of a young boy (v. 14). He then praises the God of Israel, and wishes to offer a present to Elisha (v. 15), but the prophet refuses to accept a reward and says to him, "Go in peace" (v. 19). John sees a hidden mystery in this account (fol. 74b): Namaan represents the Gentiles, who were destined to be cleansed from all their physical and spiritual pollution through the holy water of baptism. The prophet's refusal of Namaan's gift represents God's grace, which is offered free to all nations, just as Jesus commanded his disciples ("Cure the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, and raise the dead. [For just as] you received without being charged, give without charging" (fol. 74b; see Mt 10:8).

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[458] ܦܨܚܐ ܕܝܠܢ *peṣḥa dilan,* is a reference to: 1 Cor 5:7 "For Christ is our Passover who was sacrificed for us", which is a clear reference to Eucharist.

In short, for John the above examples from the Old Testament point to major spiritual themes found in the New Testament.

4.2.6.2 Explanation of why Christ was baptized

John dwells on the question of why Jesus approached John the Baptist to be baptized, and his answer is rooted in Pauline theology:

> By no means was He in need of [baptism], but He [wished] to introduce a new way which is much higher than the Law. For when we were born in flesh into this world, we were held under the power of sin, which we received by transmission from our fathers. As we have said, the flesh and the Law caused this [power of sin] to increase in us. Thus, our Lord God was pleased to elevate us completely from these things through a second birth, in order that He might make us equal to himself through the same adoption. Thus, He drew near to baptism, as I have said, so that from that point forward He might prepare for us a different way, placing us beyond the reach of the curse of the Law, the power of sin, and the tyranny of death. Thus, we are not counted as being from Adam, but rather from Christ, who became the cause of all these benefits. For when we were born into this world we rightfully became the heirs of the nature of Adam and of his punishment. Our Lord, [however,] drew near to baptism and sanctified for us a new fountain. And He was indeed the Son of God because of His union with God the Word, and was never in need of the holiness [gained] through baptism. According to the saying of the blessed David, "He was born in the beauties of holiness from the womb" (Ps 110:3), and "He did not act wickedly, nor was guile found on his lips" (Ps. 34:13; cf. 1 Pet 3:10). Rather, He approached baptism for the following [reasons: first, so that His greatness might be revealed from the testimony of the Father; and second, so that He might prepare for us the way of the baptism of adoption (fols. 97a-b).

Thus John attempts to dissolve the paradox of the sinless Son of God submitting to baptism. Most of his discussion focuses on Christ's role as a model to be emulated, so that the baptized become heirs and the adopted children of God.

4.2.6.3 Regeneration through Jesus Christ

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was thirty years old when He came to the River Jordan in order to be baptized by John the Baptist (Lk 3:23). John demonstrates that Jesus' decision to be baptized was appropriate seeing that he had fulfilled the Mosaic Law, and would now usher in the Age of Grace, for "holy baptism is the beginning of Grace" (fol. 101b). But he emphasizes that Jesus' baptism was for the sake of mankind and not for His own need (fol. 101b). In this context, baptism leads to being born again, and to being reckoned (*nethemne*, lit.

'counted') not 'from Adam', but 'from Christ'. Thus, baptism, sanctified for us by Christ, becomes a "new womb" ('*ubba ḥadtha*) which generates a new spiritual birth (fol. 97a): this "womb" is the baptismal font. As John says in another *memre*:

> Like a dove [the Holy Spirit] descended upon Him, as I have said; Her nest was made and She gave birth through Him to all people. Like chicks, She gave birth in Him to mankind, and instead of seeds, She gave them His Body and Blood (fol. 217a).

4.2.6.4 The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Peter's message in the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17) fulfils the prophecy of Joel, who said: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy" (Joel 2:28-29; fol. 126b). For John the pouring out of the Spirit follows baptism and is expressed in such things as glossolalia, prophecies, the ability to interpret, and the rest of the miracles which the faithful received (fol. 131b).[459] The idea of adoption (*simath-bnayya* in Syriac) is borrowed from Paul, whom John quotes:

> "You have not received a spirit of slavery again [to fall into] fear, but the spirit of adoption, through which we call God the Father 'Our Father'... The Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then it is clear that we are also heirs. [We are] heirs of God and are members of the inheritance of Jesus Christ" [Rom. 8:15-17]. "For in one Spirit we were baptized into one Body" [1Cor. 12:13]. Thus we rightly participate with [Christ] in the gift of adoption (fols. 100a-b).

And with baptism, one receives the new Law of grace which is inscribed upon the heart (fol. 134b) and the power of the Holy Spirit through which one is able to gain victory in the struggle against sin and Satan (fol. 100a).

4.2.7 Eucharist

The term 'Eucharist' derives from the Greek word *euchristein* ('to give thanks'). In the Church of the East, the first set of Eucharistic prayers is entitled "The Sanctification [i.e.

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[459] Also, see Paul and his description of the Spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12:1-11.

Anaphora] of the blessed apostles Mar Addai and Mar Mari."[460] The following terms are of particular interest: *raze* "mysteries"; *qurbana* "offering"; *deḇeḥtha* "sacrifice"; and *quddsha* "the Holy thing." All these terms refer to the 'living sacrifice' of Christ in the liturgy of the Church of the East.[461] For John, this essential liturgical practice is entirely prefigured in the Old Testament, as will now be discussed.

4.2.7.1 Sacrifice

In Syriac the terms *deḇḥa* (masculine form) or *deḇeḥtha* (feminine form), each of which mean 'sacrifice', refer to the offering of something of value to God in order to manifest man's worship and veneration of Him.[462] For John, the aim is not to please God by fulfilling his demands in building temples, sacrificing animals, and giving offerings and gifts, but rather to confirm our obedience towards God and our conformity to His will: "Through these [means] we are able to reveal the agreement of our will" (fols. 14a-b). The Old Testament requires sacrifices and offerings be offered but the New Testament proclaims 'the end' of sacrifices since Jesus by sacrificing himself on the Cross abolished all animal sacrifices. While the emphasis in the Old Testament is on slaughtered animals, John argues that God has no need for physical sacrifices: "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High[463]... [For] the sacrifice acceptable to God is a humble spirit" (fol. 14a).[464]

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[460] The second set is attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia, and the third and last to Nestorius of Constantinople.

[461] A liturgical prayer within the first set describes the Eucharistic elements as being "a living Sacrifice" (ܕܒܚܬܐ ܚܝܬܐ) to emphasize that Christ is alive and that He is not a "burnt offering." See *The Liturgy of the Church of the East*, ed. Joseph Qelyata, (Mosul: The Assyrian Press, 1928), 17-18.

[462] McKim, 246.

[463] See Ps 50:12-14.

[464] See Ps 51:17. Instead of burnt offerings, Isaiah already spoke of the direction of 'the truth' and the establishing of everlasting covenant, "For I the Lord who loves judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with them" (Isa 61:8).

John interprets the burnt offerings of the old covenant in a Christian context. He discusses the descent of the Holy Spirit ("divided tongues as of fire"[465]; fols. 128a-b) on the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Fire has a number of characteristics, including an ability to spread light and to consume: "Just as fire is hidden in the essence of [the Holy Spirit], when she seizes materials [*mlu'e*], she then causes them to glow and to give warmth and thus clothes [them] with the image of that which seized them" (fol. 128a).

The term *mlu'e* can also be used to refer to the Eucharistic elements, that is, the bread and wine which are placed on the altar during the Eucharistic liturgy. In the Church of the East, the moment of sanctification occurs in the epiclesis; the celebrant calls upon the Holy Spirit: *nethe mar ruḥakh qaddisha* "May your Holy Spirit come, O my Lord."[466] And during the liturgy, when the celebrant lifts up his arms and breaks the Sacraments, the assembled congregation chants "... Fire which is within the Bread mortals consume; it protects their bodies, and it burns away their debts [i.e. sins or guilt]."

In a similar vein, John turns his attention to the account of Abraham, who responds to God's call to offer his son Isaac as a burnt sacrifice (Gen 22:1-14). God is particularly pleased with Abraham's obedience on this occasion, while this divine attitude was not shown in the past when Abraham offered a number of animal sacrifices (fol. 52a):

> Such is the love of Abraham toward me that he did not hold back his only [son], offering him as a sacrifice for my satisfaction. Likewise, because of the love and compassion which I have for mankind, I also surrender my only Son to be a sacrifice in their place, so that he might pardon them, and they might live and return for the blessings that have been promised (fols. 52a-b).

Thus for John, God's rejection of animal sacrifices is clearly declared by the prophets. Jesus' action in cleansing the temple from animal sacrifice points in this direction since he said to those who were selling doves: "Take these things out of here! Do not make my Father's house a marketplace!" (Jn 2: 16). Jesus' action did not approve the sacrifice of animals, and as John explains, "the cleansing of the Temple abolishes such sacrifices and offerings of the Law" (fol. 106a). Likewise, according to Paul, the Passover lamb of the old covenant was abolished since "Christ is our Passover who was sacrificed for us" (fol. 58b).[467]

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[465] See Acts 2:3.

[466] *The Liturgy of the Church of the East*, ed. Joseph Qelayta, (Mosul: Assyrian Press, 1928), 34.

The Eucharist is also associated with the Manna. Like the Israelites who ate *manna* in the wilderness, Jesus granted his disciples his own body as nourishment,[468] and just as the Israelites drank from the rock in the wilderness He caused His blood to flow from His side for drinking (fols. 60a-b).[469] John echoes Paul's statement in 1 Cor 10:2-4: "And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ."

4.2.7.2 The offerings of Melchizedek

Melchizedek as a type of Christ is a major theme in Syriac literature (see Hebrews 5-7). Melchizedek performed his mystery through bread and wine (fol. 52a), and in the following passage John explains Paul's remarks on this special figure:

> Likewise, Melchizedek was performing his priestly duties with bread and wine [Gn 14:18]. He was a priest and a king who was administering a mystery. He took tithes from Abraham, who was under the law, and from Gentiles who were outside the law. Truly, this man administered the mystery of Christ, for Christ also is a king and a high priest who administers the mysteries. For He is the perfecter of everything, and [also] receives tithes, namely, worship from the people under the Law who are the descendants of Abraham, and from the rest of nations [who] are outside the Law (fol. 53a).

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[467] See 1 Cor 5:7. George of Arbela states that the Jewish authorities were confused in the year when Jesus celebrated his last Passover with his disciples. He argues that 14th of Nissan on that year fell on Saturday. Thus the Jews were confused about whether to celebrate the Passover on Saturday day (which begins at Friday's evening), or to preserve the Sabbath. In the end, he says, they decided to observe the regular Sabbath and to advance the Passover by one day. Thus the Passover was celebrated on Frieday (Thursday's evening), as we read in the Gospels. For George, following earlier sources, Jesus became a sacrifice on the 'real' day of Passover as "the symbol [i.e. the old image] was abandoned and the Truth [i.e. the new image] was ruled" (ܒܛܠ ܠܛܘܦܣܐ ܘܐܡܠܟ ܫܪܪܐ). See George of Arbela, *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae*, CSCO SS 141-151 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1911), bk. I, ch. 16.

[468] Jn 6:31, 49.

[469] 1 Cor 10:2-4.

4.2.7.3 Eucharist and Passover

As a Jew, Jesus accompanied his 'immediate family'[470] every year and went to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover (Lk 2:41). During His ministry, he continued this practice, but now accompanied his disciples and often asked them to prepare the Passover meal. Concerning the Last Supper, John writes, "After they had eaten the Passover according to the custom of the Law, knowing that the time of his suffering was drawing near, and that this was his last Passover, He brought his disciples from the symbol [*ṭupsa*] to the reality [*shrara*], and from image [*ṣalma*] to prototype [*tapenkha*]" (fol. 107a). John is saying that in the Last Supper, Jesus himself replaced the symbolic sacrificial lamb of the Passover, and that his actual person became the prototype of the bloodless sacrifice in the Eucharist. This is suggested by the following words placed in the mouth of Christ by John:

> Behold! This Passover has now been eaten and is abolished. Let it not be eaten again, since it has performed and fulfilled its mystery. It was sacrificed every year on my behalf. It was pointing toward my sacrifice. I will not bring about a deliverance from Egypt, but set humanity completely free from all deviation. And I will not only block the angel of death, but I will also bring everlasting life to those who consume me. Thus, abandon that which is a shadow. Approach the body (*gushma*), abandon the symbols, and gaze at the truth (fols. 107a-b).

Resh Melle contains other notes on the Eucharist. For example, the body and blood of Christ are offered for the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life, as John illustrates in the following words placed in the mouth of Christ:

> "You should not be in doubt as to how you will have an everlasting life through my body and my blood, since the illustration of this is at hand. This bread and cup which I am giving you will teach you that, if through the efficacy and power of these things, temporal life exists in your bodies, how much more should you believe that, by means of the body and the soul which I took from you for your sake, I offered a sacrifice on your behalf. And I continue to offer [it]! Behold, you will possess what you already have!" (fol. 107b).

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[470] KJV and NRSV reads 'parents', but the Syriac Pashiṭta reads *nashaw* (ܐܢܫܘ̈ܗܝ) (his relatives or immediate family) instead of *'abahaw* (ܐܒ݂ܗܘ̈ܗܝ) (his parents).

4.2.8 Trinity

In Christian theology, the term ‘Trinity’ refers to the orthodox belief that God’s substance is shared by three ‘Persons’ in the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[471] The doctrine of the Trinity was established before the end of the fourth century.[472] In a long discussion of the Trinity in Book VII, John maintains, perhaps with Jewish and Muslim critics in view, that believing in the Trinity should not be seen as an affirmation of a plurality of gods, for Christian thinking is not patterned after the pagan habit of worshipping many deities:

> The pagans, because they were walking according to the flesh, had set the thoughts of their minds on many objects. In every lodging place they set up a deity... And in all these [deities] their debate had not ceased since they had not found the God of truth. For how could God exist in such a way so that a human mind could contain Him and a created thought surpass Him? It was because of these [mistaken assumptions] that they formed and established many deities and distinguished them from each other by their nature, their might, and their action (fol. 67a).

John acknowledges that the human intellect cannot fully grasp the full understanding of the mystery of the Trinity:

> Now if someone asks why we speak of three [persons], so that [all] three of them are unlimited, we reply to him: ‘Listen, my beloved [friend], our Christian wisdom is not unattainable. By ‘wisdom’ I am not referring to that which distinguishes between things, for this is cleverness and not wisdom. Our wisdom is the Holy Trinity itself. Thus, [its mystery] can be known, but never [fully] comprehend. And we should be all the more proud that our wisdom is incomprehensible (fol. 66b).

Perhaps in response to Jewish criticism in particular, John also insists that the mystery of the Trinity was already prefigured in the Old Testament. For example, he interprets the triple angelic

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[471] In Syriac theology, the Trinity consists of ‘three *qnome*’ in the sense of ‘three persons’, and here *qnoma* translates the Greek term *prosôpon* (“person”). However, in Christology the term *qnoma* translates Greek *hypostasis*, Christ being one *prosôpon* “person” with two *kyane* “natures (human and divine)” and two *qnome* “hypostases.” John of Phenek expresses ܒܦܪ̈ܨܘܦܐ: ܗܢܘ ܕܝܢ ܒܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ to translate, “Through persons, that is, through hypothasises” (fol. 68b).

[472] In the tradition of the Chruch of the East, the defining of the Doctrine of Trinity is not attributed to the Antiochean father, Theodore of Mopsuastia, who is recognized as *mpashqana* (ܡܦܫܩܢܐ; the Interpreter), but to the Cappadocian father, Gregory of Nazianzus, who is recognized *te’ologhiyaya* (ܬܐܘܠܘܓܝܝܐ; the Theologian). Abdishoʿ of Nisibis says that “Three great theologians the Church of Christ acknowledges, John the Evangelist, Paul the Apostle, and Gregory of Nazianzus” (ܘܬܠܬܐ ܬܐܘ̈ܠܘܓܐ ܠܗ ܪ̈ܘܪܒܐ ܩܢܝܐ ܥܕܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ. ܝܘܚܢܢ ܐܘܢܓܠܝܣܛܐ: ܘܦܘܠܘܣ ܫܠܝܚܐ: ܘܓܪܝܓܘܪܝܘܣ ܕܢܙܝܢܙܘ), *The paradise of Eden*, ed. Joseph Qelayta, (repr. Mosul: The Assyrian Press, 1928), 27.

Sanctus in Isaiah 6:3 ("Holy, Holy, Holy, the Almighty Lord"; *qaddish, qaddish, qaddish, marya ḥaylthana*) as a clear reference to the three persons of the Trinity:

> The holy powers which are above matter symbolically cry out and say, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord Almighty! Heaven and earth are full of His praises." This praise [reflects] the mystery of the One eternal and holy substance, who is known in three self-existing and holy persons: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If, as some say, it was because of the magnitude of [their] praise that the angels were crying out three times, then why were they not constrained to give praise one hundred or two hundred or ever more times! But as we have said, it is a mystery! (fol. 91b)

John's interpretation of the angelic Sanctus is very close to what Narsai said some two centuries earlier:

> [The angels] preached the Trinity to the earth through their [Sanctus] glorifications. ... And they prepared the path for humanity to recite the three names [of the Trinity]... But, what is [the reason] that they praised three times? ... And for what reason did they refrain from giving even more [praise]? If they offered a thousand-thousands and many myriads of praises, yet their glory [falls] short of that [Divine] glory which was praised.[473]

Psalm 45 serves for John as another prefiguration not only of the Messiah but also of the doctrine of the Trinity:

> [For] the blessed David appropriately said, 'Gird the sword on your thigh, O mighty one' [Ps 45:3], in order to demonstrate that [Christ] would be prepared to engage in battle with the Slanderer. [He also said:] "Your majesty and glory are victorious" [v. 4], [that is to say,] 'Through the might of the Trinity which is in you, Your [victory] becomes our victory.' [David] makes this known through [the words] "Your majesty and glory are victorious." He addresses 'Your majesty' to the Word God [who dwells] in him, since it is his majesty. And [he addresses] 'the glory' to the Father who glorified Him. [For He said:] "Glorify your Son" [Jn 17:1]. And three times he repeated "Your glory is victorious," declaring, like the saying of the blessed Paul: "In Him the whole fullness of divinity dwells bodily, and in him and through Him, [God] perfects all" [Col 2:9-10] (fol. 66a).

In his explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity here in Book VII, John dismisses the connotation of plurality that the term *qnome*[474] might have for some:

> But [concerning] that which you have asked me, [namely,] 'Why do we say 'three without limit'?', we reply that we are not saying that there is one, and two, and three [in sequence], as if we were making a

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[473] See "*Memra* on the Angelic vision of Isaiah" in *Homilies of Mar Narsai II*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), fol. 240a. Likewise, Babai the Great, in his "On the glory of the triple sanctus by the angels which was heard by Isaiah the prophet", discusses how the Holy Trinity with its one substance was dimly prefigured in the Old Testament. See Babai the Great, *Liber de unione*, ed. and trans. A. Vaschalde, CSCO 79-80, (Paris: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1915), 26.

[474] Theologians of the Church of the East use *qnoma* (ܩܢܘܡܐ) to express two meanings in theology. Within the doctrine of the Trinity, "three *qnome*" (ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ) means "three hypostases" or "three Persons", but when the terms *qnoma* or *qnome* are used in the doctrine of Christology, they are understood only as "hypostasis" or "hypostases." For a classic discussion of this issue, see below (footnote 483).

> break with the first thing, and then adding a second and a third to make three. This is certainly not our [argument], and it is foreign to the worship of God. Thus, we do not say 'three Fathers' nor 'three Sons'. If we were saying 'three Fathers,' necessity would demand that each one of them would also have His own [son], and it would cease to be the case that all that belongs to them would be shared in common (fol. 68a).

As he says in another place, it is wrong to think that the *qnume* are countable such as when we count Paul, Peter, and Apollos as three different individuals (fol. 92a). Here John may be echoing Basil the Great (330-379 A.D.), who pointed out that Christians use the conjunction "and" before the divine names, as in "Glory to the Father, *and* to the Son *and* to the Holy Spirit," but the *qnume* are not to be counted. He mentions an anonymous man from Mespotamia[475] who was "[v]ery trustworthy in his thought and well-versed in the language of his country [and who] uses the letter *waw.*"

> Now, since we say 'one Father' we declare this: that he has a Son. Consider that which belongs to Him, that is, what He possesses. If you ask, 'How?' we reply that He begat Him. And if you ask again 'in what way?' [we reply,] 'As He [alone] knows'. Again, if you say, 'The Father and the Son are two [in total], but how then [do we explain the names] 'Father' and 'Son', as well as [the relationship] between the two of them?' But listen carefully! They are two by *qnōmē* (*hypostases*), but not by nature, since they are one by nature, like mind and speech. How can that be? Listen! The Father [is] in the Son, and the Son [is] in the Father. 'In every place the Father exists', and in the same manner also the Holy Spirit. [For] the [divine] Being is known in a threefold expression: one who begets, one who is begotten, and one who proceeds, so that the [divine] Being may be perfect, entirely from itself, entirely in itself, and entirely self-sufficient, that is, having its own unique nature.

As John goes on to explain, although the terms "one who begets" and "one who is begotten" may imply temporal succession, in fact the Father is the "cause" (*ʿeltha*) of the Son *and* the Son is the cause of the Father. Unlike the case among humans, when used to refer to the Trinity, the term 'Father' does not mean that He is older than the Son (fol. 68b).

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[475] Was Ephrem in Basil's mind? See Basil of Caesarea, *The Syriac Versions of the De Spiritu Sancto,* vols. 576, 577, ed. and trans. David G.K. Taylor, (Lauvain: In Aedibus Peeters, 1999), par. 155.

4.2.9 Christology

As discussed above, by the late 7th century the three main branches of eastern Christianity had established clear theological boundaries for their respective communities. John is quite clear in his understanding of and commitment to the Christology of the Church of the East.

John employs several terms from the Old Testament which are given Christological meanings, including Lord (*marya*), Son of Man (*breh d-nasha*), Wisdom (*ḥekhemtha*), Son of God (*breh d-ʻalaha*), Son of David (*breh d-dawid*), Annointed One (*mshiḥa*), and servant (*ʿab̠da*). Naturally, John relies on the Gospels and on Paul in his use of these terms. He cites 1Cor 12:3 to explain that the Lordship of Christ is not a conclusion of human reason but an insight given by the Holy Spirit (fol. 37b). Here John explains several of the titles connected with Christ:

> For He is the Son of God by nature, [and possesses the properties of that] nature, and He is the son of David by nature, and [possesses the properties of that] nature, except that He was born without conception and was found to be without sin [1 Pet 2:22; Heb 4:15]. For He is [born] from the Father without a mother, and [born] from [his] mother without a [human] father. He is One: Son of God and Son of Man. He is One in *prosopon* but not in nature. For the divine and human natures became united in will from the beginning in the one *prosopon* of sonship, without destroying their [distinct] properties. It is this *prosopon* who was called, and [indeed] is, 'Lord Christ' by the holy angels. This is Jesus Christ (fol. 93a).

According to John, the dual nature of Christ is also reflected in the Gospel. Christ is addressed as "the son of David" and as "the Son of God." In Mt 1:1 ("The book of the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham") He is human, while in Mark 1:1 ("The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God") He is God (fol. 92b). Likewise, John sees the fulfillment of God's dispensation in Christ, who is given the titles 'Lord' and 'God': "Those [before Christ, submitted] through signs and miracles, while the rest through Grace were subjugated and will be subjugated to Christ, as if to a king, [He who is] Lord and God of all" (fol. 57a). John is also aware of Phil 2:6-7: "For the one who was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be seized, but emptied himself and took the form of a slave, and in this lowly form was seen as a human. [Thus] he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death" (fol. 42b; see also fol. 91a). John offers an expanded interpretation of this verse in the following passage:

> He had the authority to bring about our salvation through a command alone. For he was able [to do this], but it did not please Him, since it would not have helped us. Why? He did not consider seizing this, He who was equal with God, but emptied himself and took the form of a slave. He honoured the form of the slave that He took by his unity with it. Henceforth, they are not two but became one in person, honour, and might, although in other properties they are to be distinguished (fol. 108a).

As John notes in various passages, elsewhere in the New Testament there is an emphasis on the special relationship which exists between Jesus Christ and God: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30; fol. 103b); "Whoever sees me has seen the Father" (John 14:9; fol. 103b); "Before Abraham I was" (John 8:58; fol. 103b). There are also some passages which, in John's opinion, demonstrate that Christ has two natures, for example: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19-20; fols. 18b-19a). The debate between Jesus and the Pharisees (Mt 22:42-45) is also telling: The Pharisees say about the Christ that he is "The son of David", and Jesus then asks why David calls him 'My Lord?' For John, Jesus is clearly arguing that he is not "only a human" but also "the Lord of all" (fols. 74b-75a), and has a special relationship with the Persons of the Holy Trinity,

> We believe that as it is written, "the whole fullness of divinity dwells bodily in Him" (Col. 2:9). For if [we say] 'through the Son' [we] also [acknowledge] the Father, and if [we say] 'through the Father and the Son', [we] also [acknowledge] the Holy Spirit, since [they are] one substance. Therefore, wherever the Son is present, the Father is definitely [present there] as well. The same applies to the Holy Spirit. But if a person turns and says, 'If such is the case, according to your word, why do we say that it was God the Word alone who was united with our humanity, on the basis of which we call Christ 'the Son', but neither 'Holy Spirit' nor 'Father'? (fol. 128b)[476]

John's concept of Christology is also apparent in his evaluation of the Council of Ephesus and the Council of Chalcedon, and what he writes is what one would expect from a seventh century theologian of the Church of the East. About the Council of Ephesus, he says that bishops arrived at the Council at the command of “the Emperor who was ruling then”, whom he does not name because his sister Pulcheria was the acting ruler (fol. 142a). Unjust things happened there: Cyril of Alexandria won the support of Pulcheria against Nestorius of Constantinople, and Pulcheria is described as “the Second Jezebel” (a reference to the wicked queen Jezebel, wife of king Ahab; see 2 Kings 9). The Council convened through bribery and the assistance of the “Second Herodias” (i.e. Pulcheria) to set up a “Jezreelite judgement” (ܕܝܢܐ ܐܝܙܪܥܠܝܐ) before the arrival of all the invited bishops (fol. 142a). And just as Elijah the prophet fled from Jezebel to Mt. Carmel so “was the holy Nestorius driven out into the Wilderness of Awasa” (fol. 142a).

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[476] John seems to quote Babai who states, "For why was it not the unity of the Father, or that of the Holy Spirit, or that of the whole Trinity with our human nature, which was taken as a prosopon (i.e image) of the worshipped dispensation, but one of the persons of the Trinity, that is, God the Word, while the divine substance is one and equal in its being." See Babai the Great, *Liber de unione*, ed. and trans. A. Vaschalde, CSCO 79-80, (Paris: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1915), II, ch. vi, 36.

About the Council of Chalcedon, John is no less dismissive of it on account of its key players:

> Again, [the bishops] arrived for the second synod at the city of Chalcedon, on the pretext that the monk Eutyches had confirmed the wickedness that had been sown by the Egyptian [i.e. Cyril], when in fact it was Cyril who planted and Eutyches who irrigated, but Satan who caused it to grow (fol. 142a)... When the bishops arrived at the City of Chalcedon, [they] made an inquiry concerning [the title] ‘God-bearer’ [*yaldath ’alaha*], and they attributed suffering (ܚܫܘܫܘܬܐ) to the humanity [of Christ], as was their opinion,[477] and they established a new dogma [by] extinguishing fire with fire!... And while they confessed that which they had received according to what had been held from the beginning, they turned and rejected it by establishing [the idea of] one *qnoma* [ܩܢܘܡܐ] for two natures (ܟܝ̈ܢܐ) without distinguishing that absolutely no nature can exists without a *qnoma*. For they thought: ‘If we confess that [there are] two *qnome* for two natures, then there is no reason to anathematize Nestorius, as the empress Pulcheria is commanding’, “for they loved human glory more than the Glory of God” [see Jn 12:43]. Thus, they anathematized Eutyches as the one who had wickedly irrigated, but regrettably, they accepted the Egyptian, the wicked planter. They also restricted and placed under anathematization all the skilled doctors who had departed from the world a long time ago (I am referring to Diodore and Theodore and the rest of the illustrious ones like them) (fols. 142b-143a).

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[477] Isaac of Nineveh explains which hypostasis (*qnoma*) one should attribute to the Lord Christ at the time of his passion: “Behold, my soul is troubled.” See *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts I*, ed. and trans. Luise Abramowski and Alan E. Goodman, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 42-3.

John expresses his distaste for these two Church councils by giving them disdainful names. The first name is *puḥra*, from Akkadian *puḫru*, which refers in Syriac to a 'pagan assembly'.[478] John says that:

> [s]ince the Church of the East was fully liberated from the wickedness of these two *puḥre*, it remained established and firm in the true faith [signed] by the three hundred and eighteen [bishops at Nicea]. The [doctrines of] the suffering [of God] and of a single qnoma [for the two natures of Christ] were rejected, but it accepted those fathers of the school of Diodore, those who were firm in the apostolic faith. From that time, the ecclesiastical Body was torn into three parts (fol. 143a).

The second name he uses is *knushye menathanaye* ('partial councils'): "[T]hrough these two partial councils [ܬܪܝܢ ܟܢܘ̈ܫܝܐ ܡܢܬܢ̈ܝܐ] the blessed Nestorius was judged and expelled from his see" (fol. 143a). For John these two councils were "partial" since they were not accepted by all:

> The Easterners confessed, "The One Son of God [is both] God and Man: Man 'became God' (*eth'allah;* ܐܬܐܠܗ) and God 'became Man' (*ethbarnash;* ܐܬܒܪܢܫ). [Thus, Christ has] two natures (*kyane*; ܟܝ̈ܢܐ) and two hypostases (*qnome*; ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ), in unity, one *prosopon* (ܦܪܨܘܦܐ) of Sonship.[479] While preserving their individual properties, they (i.e. the two natures and the two *qnome*) perfected the [divine] economy on behalf of our salvation. That is [to say], this *Prosopon*, who is willingly united from two natures, is Lord, Christ, and God [who rules] over all. [Among] the Westerners, however, one [group] holds the doctrine of [divine] suffering (*hashoshutha*; ܚܫܘܫܘܬܐ) and death; I do not know what [else] to call it. The other [group affirms] two natures (*kyane*; ܟܝ̈ܢܐ), but [only] one *qnoma*, while avoiding the idea of 'two *qnome*' lest they be considered to have introduced two Sons. They do not understand that if this is the case, [then] the 'nature' (*kyana*; ܟܝܢܐ) is also able to enact (*mse lmes'ar*; ܡܨܐ ܠܡܣܥܪ) that which

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[478] On the *puḥra* as pagan assembly see A. Harrak, "The Assembly of Seleucia on the Tigris according to the Acts of Mar Mari," A. Panaino-G. Pettinato (eds.), *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena,* Ravenna 2002, pp. 109-118.

[479] In a metrical hymn, Babai the Great expresses the following Christological teaching of the Church of the East by saying: "... [T]he natures are retained in their *qnume*, in one person of One Sonship. And as the Godhead is: three *qnume* one essence, likewise the sonship of the Son, is in two natures one person ..." See "Blessed is the Compassionate One" in the book of *Ḥudra*, vol. I, 118.

> the *qnoma* (*hypostasis*; ܩܢܘܡܐ) [does].[480] From then until now, [each] of these three [Church] divisions have held [their dogmas] as if they were [apostolic] tradition (fols. 143a-b).[481]

John's expression 'Man became God' reflects 'Christology from below,' that is, as a result of the union between the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, His human nature moves towards his exaltation and ruling as God over all. His expression 'God became Man' reflects 'Christology from above', that is, as a result of the above union, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity (God the Word) who is in form of God, by taking on human nature became in the form of man. John maintains that Christ manifests the unity of his being ('the Prosopon of Sonship') willingly (*ṣewyana'ith*). In another passage, John explains what he means by "willingly": "We should never say that [this] union was forced upon [Christ's] humanity, but rather [occurred] through an agreement of the will, through [his] teaching, and through the work of crucifixion" (fol. 71b). The phrase "agreement of the will" and the denial of the use of force preclude any notion of the hypostatic mixture or intermingling that Monophysitism can suggest. His usage of theological technical terms, including *prosopon*, *qnome*, and the concept of unity through will shows that John was well aware of the Christological debates of his day and capably defended the Christology of the Church of the East.[482]

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[480] A similar expression is found in an early Christological letter of Ishoʿyahb II (628-645 A.D.) to Rabban Abraham of Madai. He expresses his Church's view of the Council of Chalcedon, which had confessed Jesus Christ to have two natures and one person (*qnoma* in Syriac). Ishoʿyahb argues that "those who were assembled at the Council of Chalcedon, while they presented the appearance of correcting the faith, actually slid away from the truth of faith... [B]y [confessing Christ to have] one *qnoma*, they destroyed [their] confession of two natures, and by [confessing Christ to have] two natures, they contradicted and dissolved [their confession] of one *qnoma*. They found themselves standing at a fork in the road, but they deviated from the blessed line which the orthodox [Fathers] had reached. They did not join the congregations of the heretics [of Ephesus], but were tearing down and building while there was no foundation under their feet. I do not know on which side we should count them! Both nature and scripture testify that it is impossible for their statement to stand. For in one nature many *qnome* may be found, but there have never been various natures in one *qnoma*, nor has [such a thing] been heard of!" See "The Letter of Ishoʿyahb Gdalaya to Rabban Abraham of Madai" in MMC, Syr. 47, fols. 235b-236a.

[481] In a similar way, ʿAbdishoʿ says that following the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), Christianity split into three Christological divisions. See "The Book of the Jewel [lit. 'the Pearl']" in *The Nestorians and their Rituals II*, ed. Percy George Badger, (London: Darf Publishers Limited, 1852; repr. 1987), 399-400.

[482] In the following passage, Babai had demonstrated concerning the distinguishment between three Christological terms, that is, nature, hypostasis and prosopon. Syriac terms are inserted in this English translation to reflect the

John stresses the necessity of the divine becoming human if salvation is to take place, and what he says sounds like a confession of faith:

> He was born as a human for He was a human; He stirred up the Magi to bring gifts since He was also God.[483] What [happened] next? He was circumcised, offered sacrifices, fulfilled the Law, and passed through all the stages of human nature: "For Jesus was growing in stature, wisdom and grace towards God and mankind" [Lk 2:52]. [He] repaid the debts of the Law, and fulfilled [his] obligations to his parents: "Jesus went with Mary and Joseph and was subject to them" [Lk 2:51]. He came in His flesh in order to condemn sin, and at the same time to pass judgement on the one who had been tyrannically ruling over humanity. [This] taking possession of our first-born was absolutely necessary, since it would not have been proper for our Saviour to deliver us tyrannically from the one who was holding us tyrannically. Rather, while lawfully passing judgement against him, he might condemn him and deliver us from his tyranny. This would have been impossible without the first-born of our nature. For just as death came through a man, so too it was appropriate that the coming to life of the dead should be through a man: "Just as through one man, sin entered the world, and through sin death" [Rom 5:12], likewise also through one man, Jesus Christ, righteousness, justice, peace and everlasting life will rule. Just as in Adam we all die, since we became partakers of his nature, likewise through Christ we are all living since we are of the same nature. In this way, [His] taking possession of our first-born was appropriate, lest our salvation be despised. For it was just that the Son should pay back the debt [owed] to his Father and set his brothers free from the slavery by which they had been maliciously seized. But He would pay it back by no other means than by extending the hand of another [i.e. God the Word],[484] this which was accomplished for us through the unity of God the Word with us. For He (and through Him, our first-born) was shown to be without sin, and through him, salvation and life were also decreed for us, so that, as we became participants in [the divine] nature, Grace would also be common [to all]. Thus, it is excellent and

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exact words in the Syriac text. "... [E]very nature [ܟܝܢܐ] is known and revealed in the hypostases [ܒܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ] which are beneath it, and every hypostasis [ܩܢܘܡܐ] is a demonstrator and upholder of the nature [ܕܟܝܢܐ] from which it is. And evey prosopon [ܦܪܨܘܦܐ] in the hypostasis [ܒܩܢܘܡܐ] is fixed and made distinct (as to what) it is. And no nature [ܟܝܢܐ] can be known without a hypostasis [ܩܢܘܡܐ] and no hypostasis [ܩܢܘܡܐ] can stand without a nature [ܟܝܢܐ], and no prosopon [ܦܪܨܘܦܐ] can be distinguished without the hypostasis [ܒܩܢܘܡܐ]. Take the hypostasis [ܩܢܘܡܐ] and show us the prosopon [ܦܪܨܘܦܐ]! Take away the nature [ܟܝܢܐ] and show us the hypostasis [ܩܢܘܡܐ]! Because nature [ܕܟܝܢܐ] is common and invisible, it is known in its own hypostases [ܘܒܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ]. And just as the nature [ܕܟܝܢܐ] of the Trinity is common to the three hypostases [ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ], so the nature [ܟܝܢܐ] of men is common to all the hypostases [ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ] of men. And if we say of the two natures [ܟܝ̈ܢܐ] that they were united in one prosopon [ܦܪܨܘܦܐ], not declaring experessly two hypostases [ܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ] with them, we are saying that the whole nature [ܟܝܢܐ] of the Trinity was united, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that the whole nature [ܟܝܢܐ] of men was united, Jesus, Judas and Simon. This is (a matter) of wickedness and blasphemy, in that prosopon [ܕܦܪܨܘܦܐ] cannot be the same as nature [ܟܝܢܐ], because it (*sc*. nature) is common; but it (the prosopon) is fixed and distinguished in hypostasis [ܒܩܢܘܡܐ], as in the visible, so in the known (things), so that the Father is not the Son, nor is Gabriel Michael, nor Peter John. For the difference between these is in prosopa [ܒܦܪ̈ܨܘܦܐ], not in hypostases [ܕܩܢܘ̈ܡܐ] and not in the equality of the natures [ܕܟܝ̈ܢܐ]." See *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts I-II*, ed. and trans. Luise Abramowski and Alan E. Goodman, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 207-8.

[483] On the union of two natures Ḥnanishoʿ says, "God the Word does not resemble Melchizedek; he who resembles Melchizedek is a hypostasis like him." See *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts I*, ed. and trans. Luise Abramowski and Alan E. Goodman, Luise Ambramowski, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 102.

[484] "Our nature, for its part, was weakened by the harshness of the service of iniquity that it rendered and, by reason of all these evils, was unable to redeem itself from death. It raised its hands [in despair], crying: *Wretched man that I am, who shall set me free from this body of death?* And God, his Maker, answered him and stretched out to him a hand of redemption through Jesus Christ our Lord..." See "Explanation of the Pasch" by Cyrus of Edessa in *Six Explanations of the Liturgical Feasts*, ed. and trans. Wiliam F. Macomber, (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1974), VI, 5.

> quite proper that a man should become God for the sake of us humans and for the sake of our salvation, and also that God himself should become man because of His unity with God the Word from the beginning (fols. 95b-96a).

John concludes that even if an angel comes from high to speak to us and make changes in His good news (Gospel), we will neither deny His humanity, nor would we attribute suffering to His Divinity.[485]

4.2.10 Ecclesiology

John's concept of Church, his ecclesiology, is rooted in the Bible and in early Syriac literature, as the following metaphors given to the Church show. Moreover, the liturgy of the Church, which John undoubtedly knew very well, must have had a great influence on his understanding of the many themes and symbols are associated with the Church.

4.2.10.1 The Tabernacle as a prototype of the Church

God commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle, whom to choose for the priesthood, the way to offer sacrifices, and how Sabbath and Passover would be observed (fol. 51b):[486] "In the tabernacle called *mashkan-zaḇna* "temporal dwelling" which Moses made in the wilderness, God dwelled and manifested His glory, and also received sacrifices and offerings. Its name "temporal dwelling" symbolized the temporal world since it was through His grace that God was pleased and descended to dwell among mankind" (fol. 14a).

John argues that God can neither be contained in one place, an idea expressed in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the new temple (1 kings 8:27), nor does He desire sacrifices and offerings, as expressed by David (Ps 40:6) (fols. 14a-b). For God declares that the world is His, and that He has no need for sacrifices to eat or drink:

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[485] See Gal 1:8 and *Ḥudra*, vol. II, 681.

[486] See *Exodus*, Chapters 25-27 *and* 36-38.

> [God] does not dwell in stone temples. [Therefore], if you multiply adorned temples for Him while not surrendering your heart and will, [also if you] multiply vows and offerings while not obeying his commandments and walking through His ways, He will neither be reconciled nor he will be pleased through all these. For God said: behold, heaven and earth are mine and full of me. For temples and sacrifices, altars and offerings, all these were given to us from God. And He is pleased with them [as long as] we obey His commandments. It is through these that we are able to demonstrate the agreement of our will (fols. 14a-b).

4.2.10.2 The Church as the Body of Christ

Paul's theology provides key themes for later commentaries on the Church, he who talks at length about the unique relationship between the Church as community of believers and the risen Christ: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27); "He [Christ] is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything" (Col 1:18). In this regard, *Resh Melle* is heavily influenced by Pauline theology, but John seems to go beyond it in that he does not limit the Church to the redeemed ones on earth alone but also includes the heavely ones that did not need redemption:

> In His grace, God did not cease throughout all generations from enacting all [his plans] concerning the race of mankind, until He brought them to this [status of] adopted children. They were in one spirit, with their being, with each other, and with the holy angels, and [God] made them [all] one body of his Son, whose head is Jesus Christ" (fol. 127a).

Perhaps John is influenced by Pauls's statement: "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). Since the angels, together with all mankind, confess the lordship of Christ, therefore they become part of the Body of Christ. Nonetheless, *Resh Melle* dwells on the human side of the Church, as the author argues that the heretics severely damage the Church by dividing the community of the faithful, accusing them of "[ripping] apart the body of Christ" (fol. 137b).

4.2.10.3 The Church as the Bride of Christ

One of the most important New Testament metaphors for the Church is ‘Bride of Christ’ (e.g. Jn 3:29; Mt 9:14-15; Eph 5:22, etc.). John, however, explores imagery in the Old Testament to shed light on the concept of the Church as the Bride of Christ. Both Isaiah (54:5-6) and Jeremiah (31:32) metaphorically call God the husband of Israel, thus making the latter His wife. John exploits this prophetic metaphor to stress the great extent of God’s care and love for the people of Israel, just as a true husband loves his wife and cares for her (fol. 78b). When Israel goes astray from Him, worshiping other gods, God rebukes her as a prostitute (Jer 3:8). John plays on the word *baʿlā* which means both “husband” and the deity Baal: “When the people of Israel make a statue and call it *baʿlā*, it is like a woman calling her partner *baʿlā* (‘husband’); they declare their love for Baal.” John then explains the deeper meaning of this Old Testament theme:

> The bridegroom is Christ, and the bride is that congregation of the house of Israel, and the friend of the groom is Moses. Thus, [God] sent Moses into Egypt and he spoke with her. He betrothed her [i.e. Israel] to [Him] and adorned her as is fitting for the one who is betrothed to the son of a king, and the fame of her glory went out into the entire world. Now lest she forget her betrothed, every day He sent to her [His] prophets as messengers. He was renewing with her the covenants [He had made with her] and confirming her dowry. But she did not remain [faithful] to His covenant and committed adultery. Before her wedding day arrived, she deceived her bridegroom and multiplied her adulteries, so much so that her bridegroom heard [about them]. But because he loved her, he was not willing to send her away. Instead, he sent to her all his servants, [instructing them] to say, ‘Cease from your adultery! Behold! The day of my arrival is near!’ She, however, killed everyone who came to her. When the day of her wedding arrived, her betrothed came in order to lead her and take her to his bridal chamber. He wished to determine whether or not those things which had been spoken in his presence concerning her were all true. [Therefore] He concealed his royal garments by wearing casual clothes over them, like one of those earlier servants who had been sent to her. He began to rebuke her and to [persuade her to] turn away from her evil [actions], [but] she seized him and killed him [like the prophets]. And when His father heard about the death of His son, he became angry. And since He had the power to do so, He came and revived and resurrected His son and betrothed another woman to Him, a daughter of the Gentiles, and gave a bill of divorce to the murderer (fol. 79a).

Thus the Church is betrothed to Christ, here referred to as “a daughter of the Gentiles.”

In another work (*A Memra on Virginity and Holiness*), John limits himself to the concept of the soul being the bride of Christ. He gives instructions for the “chaste covenant of male and female virgins”, adding that “no one should blame us for choosing to speak mostly in a feminine way through this work, for we have desired to compose a teaching that fits [both] men and women equally" (fol. 157b). The fact that "soul" in Syriac (*nafsha*) is grammatically feminine contributes to the bride/bridegroom imagery of John. Commenting on the well-known biblical verse "and the two shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Mt 19:5), he writes, "This [verse] is [a reference to] the soul which guards virginity and our Lord – for the holy soul is authorized to speak with Christ with confidence, as a bride to [her] bridegroom" (fol. 164a). And concerning the words, "[A] man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife" (Mt 19:5), John addresses the soul by saying, "Approach our Lord with great diligence; this is better than having parents, brothers [and sisters], and sons and daughters" (fol. 159a). John was certainly aware of the metaphoric concept used by Paul to demonstrate the ideal household relationship between a husband and wife, modeled after that of Christ and the Church. He is convinced that this relation between Christ the bridegroom and the Church the bride is applicable also to those living a monastic life.

4.2.10.4 Apostolic Church (*ʿedta shliḥayta*)

An apostolic church normally attributes its early evangelization to an apostle who was amongst the circle of the twelve or that of the group of seventy. Both groups were elected by Jesus Christ; however the circle of twelve were elected at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and immediately after his baptism, while the election of the seventy-two[487] was at a time later. Christian churches began to associate their Christianization with an apostle who held a prominent position amongst the disciples of Jesus. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, claims the primacy of the bishop of Rome since it attributes its evangelization to Simon Peter. Thus according to the Roman Catholic doctrine, 'the Pope' is the successor of Peter. The Church of the East attributes its evangelization to Thomas (among the twelve), and to Addai (and his disciple Mari) who are among the seventy. While John speaks about the 'the Church of Kokhe in the East' (fol. 137a), Kokhe near Ctesiphon being the birth place of the Church, and as he clearly mentions "the Church of the East" (fols. 140a-b, fol. 141a, fol. 143a, fols. 149a-b), he is silent about the early evangelization of this Church, and makes no references to the *Teaching of Addai the Apostle*. Although he provides no specific information about the origins of the Church in the Persian Empire, John's general understanding is that the first apostles responded to the Great Commission (see Matt. 28:19-20) and spread the faith to all the known regions of the world.[488]

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[487] The earliest manuscripts do not agree on the number of disciples mentioned in Luke 10:1, some giving 'seventy' while others say 'seventy-two'. In general, Syriac authors follow the latter reading. A preference for 'seventy-two' may be based on the story of the appointment of seventy elders to assist Moses (Numbers 11), in which two other men outside the tent also received the spirit.

There are in *Resh Melle* many other themes that reflect John's concept of Church, but we will limit ourselves to the following: 1) the Church as Christocentric, 2) the apostolic succession, and 3) the notion of the catholic (universal) church.

4.2.10.5 The Church as Christocentric

That Jesus is absolutely at the centre of the Church is but rooted in the New Testament. The Gospels narrate the baptism of Jesus, his public ministry, his passion, death, and resurrection, and Paul's epistles are the earliest Christian essays in whose centre is 'Christ'. This Christocentric emphasis is also proclaimed by John bar Penkaye regading the person of unity between (humanity and God the Word), that is, Jesus Chirst. He says in this regard, that "[It is fitting for Christ's] high-priesthood to remain forever since He became the guardian of the whole rational salvation, and the mediator of all good things" (fol. 76b). He adds again, "For he alone exists eternally before every thing [was created]" (fol. 123b).

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[488] "The apostles, as was their custom, went around all the land under heaven, that is to say, in Judea, Rome, Syria, the Islands of the Sea, Egypt, Kush, Armenia, among the Persians, in Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and all the ends of the earth. They were preaching the word of God, making disciples, baptizing, establishing the faithful through the word[s] of [their] teaching, and through signs, miracles, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They were going from city to city building churches, setting up altars, ordaining priests and deacons, [establishing] all ecclesiastical adornments, issuing canons and laws and commandments according to the divine will" (fols. 132b-133a).

Paul expresses his thanksgiving and praise in (Trinitarian formula), "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be will all of you" (2 Cor 13:13). It is interesting to note that this same formula of Paul's praise was incorporated twice in one of the most ancient Christian prayers, *the Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari* still used today in the Church of the East.[489] The normal orderly formula of reciting the persons of the Holy Trinity however should be as it was proclaimed by Jesus in His last commission to the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ..." (Mt 28:19). But Paul's verse in 2 Corinthian 13:13 incorporated in the *Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari* emphasizes Christ as the centre figure through whom God brought salvation to mankind. Again the same is expressed by Paul in saying, "For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5-6).

4.2.10.6 The Apostolic Succession

By 'apostolic succession' is meant that the authenticity of a bishop rests on the laying-on of hands at his ordination, a ritual going back to Jesus' apostles. John says that Christ had established his 'apostles' as 'the foundation of the church' (fol. 108a), a statement echoeing Matthew 16:18: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Mt 16:18). John does not discuss this verse and does not single out Peter as the foundation of the Church, but he acknowledges Simon Peter of being *resha d-talmide* “head of the disciples” (fol. 127b). This is based on Pauline theology where Paul urges the Gentiles to built their faith on Christ, “Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). Aphrahaṭ too, in his first demonstration on faith, argues at length about how Jesus Christ is the foundation, the cornerstone, the building, and the *taṭlila* “the roof.”[490]

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[489] See, A. Gelston, *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1992). The two citations of Paul (both from 2 Cor 13:13) appear on pages 26 and 43 of the Syriac text of *The Liturgy of the Church of the East*, ed. Joseph Qalayta, (Mosul: The Assyrian Press, 1928).

For John, the apostels were in the likeness of the prophets since both were disciples of the Holy Spirit; hence they were preaching what was spoken to them by the Holy Spirit (fol. 37b). The church’s authentic teaching is based on the word of God which was proclaimed ealier by the prophets and later through the apostles. The apostolic teaching is cleary expressed that the church should continue in her mission into the world, since John says, “But as we are the disciples of the prophets and the apostles, we speak of what we have learned from them” (fol. 37b). John strongly believes by this authenticity, which belongs to God’s economy who is the author of both testaments, the Old and the New. In this regard, John confirms that “Each one of the things that He foretold through the prophets was fulfilled in its time. [Likewise] He intends at the end, to teach us through action, that also these things that He has promised through the apostles will be fulfilled without alteration” (fol. 27b).

4.2.10.7 The Church is ‘Catholic’

Despite the fact that John is writing well after the divisions which resulted from the Council of Chalcedon, his ecclesiology nevertheless includes an emphasis on the catholicity of the Church. John acknowledges the multitude of Christian faithful in various nations who have abandoned their ancient ways of worship and have assembled into a single Church:

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[490] See “Aphraatis sapientis persae demonstrations” in *Patrologia Syriaca, pars prima*, ed. and trans. D. Ioannes Parisot, (Paris: 1894; repr., Turnhout, Belgium: Editions Brepols, 1980).

> First it is necessary for us to understand that before the coming of our Lord, all the nations were living in error and shameful works. Various according to their languages, their lands, and their races, they were also distinguished by their thoughts and by the idols that they invented. But when the coming of our Lord reached them, one faithful Church was assembled from all [the nations], and through baptism, we all became worthy of adoption through grace (fol. 73a).

John refers to the era when, according to the great mission which was assigned by Jesus Christ, the apostles went and preached the Gospel to various regions:

> Likewise, these four evangelists will be the bond and the tie of the whole structure of truth that rules in the four corners of the world. When the desire of the faithful was fulfilled in this manner in every place, the apostles, according to their custom, were going around every land under heaven. I am referring to Judea, Rome, Syria, the islands of the [Mediterranean] Sea, Egypt, Kush, Armenia, Persia, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and all the ends of the Earth. They were preaching the word of God and making disciples and baptizing. They were confirming the faithful through teaching, but also through signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit. They were going around the cities, building churches and setting up altars, ordaining priests and deacons, [and teaching concerning] all ecclesiastical ornamention. And according to the divine will, they handed down canons and laws and commandments. They entrusted them to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and they taught the Gentiles concerning the resurrection, judgement, and the work which is worthy of reward (fols. 132b-133a).

In his interpretation of Psalm 45 (section 4.4.3.1), John argues that the returning of the Gentiles to the worship of the One God, as part of a single Church, was predicted in the Old Testament. Arguing against Jewish exegesis, he says,

> For who is not convinced that these [verses] apply only to the Church of the Gentiles?... Where, O Jew, does scripture show that the daughter of Pharoah became a ruler or a leader? For no ruler over the whole people came forth from Solomon; [his son] Rehoboam ruled and had dominion over one tribe only. Behold! The children of the Church are rulers and leaders in the four quarters of the world (fol 74a).

John thus affirms the existence one holy church, which is apostolic and catholic, even though it exists in different places and seems to be divided by political powers.[491]

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[491] Two centuries earlier, Marutha explained why the Church fathers at the Council of Nicaea had used the term ‘Catholic’. He says that since within paganism there were many *knushyatha* (ܟܢܘܫܝ̈ܬܐ; ‘congregations’) which proclaimed a multitude of gods, the affirmation of ‘one catholic church’ would refute this notion completely. He adds that just as there is One God and One Baptism, so too there is “One Catholic, glorious and apostolic church”, as the Nicene Creed declares. See, *The Canons Ascribed to Maruta of Maipherqat*, ed. and trans. Arthur Vööbus, (Louvain: CORPUS, 1982), Syr. 152; Eng. 127.

4.2.11 Death

In Christian theology death is of two types. Physical death is a consequence of the separation of the soul from the body, while moral death is a separation from God through sin, which God seeks to overcome in His love. Conquering sin requires repentance and God’s forgiveness:

> That Adam was created mortal by nature, I believe no one doubts. Likewise, if someone thinks that God placed death on Adam in anger when he disregarded His commandment, this is clearly impious. It is the same above and below: the love that parents show toward their children, He showed toward [Adam]. Likewise, His love did not allow Him to issue a curse against the one who had completely dishonoured Him, and all of [His] anger against Adam was driven away. Thus, will He bring punishment equally and without distinction upon all humanity, upon the just and wicked, “because of the transgression of the commandment by one man alone”? Before [Adam], who did wrong, died, as the just and terrible judgement would require, the innocent Abel, in whom wrongdoing and transgression were not found, died first. From this demonstration it is clear that God planned to create mortal beings from the beginning. He made death attack them whenever they transgress [His] command, so that He might fix in them fear of His laws and hatred for sin.The significance of this is that just as sin and death entered all [human] nature through the wrongdoing of one man who obeyed Satan, so too in the same way righteousness and eternal life would enter and rule all human nature because of the obedience of one Man [See Rom 5:12-21]. Through Adam death and sin came upon us. But [now] every person has an opportunity, since through Christ these things have come to an end in our entire nature, and will be brought to an end by Him completely. Not every man, however, is willing to confess, which is proof of God’s mercy and a sign of our injustice (fols. 9a-b).[492]

In short, death is a natural phenomenon that mankind (and other living creatures) would inevitably experience. Physical death is therefore not considered as punishment for mankind because of Adam’s sin. John seems to be against the concept of ‘original sin’ (or better, ‘original guilt’) transmitted through Adam to all mankind. Rather, he seems to be saying that all persons have a predisposition to sin, and that punishment is directed only against those who have freely chosen to sin. The same idea is expressed by ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis in his work *The Pearl*, a work which was designed to represent the official doctrine of the Church of the East:[493]

> Now, hereby God declared the freedom of man’s will; for, had they not been free to act, he would have wronged them in punishing their transgression of the command; whereas, if they acted of their own free will He justly condemned them, inasmuch as with propensity towards evil and in their own pride of spirit,

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[492] ܡܘܬܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܡܚܒܠܗ ܡܚ̈ܘܬܐ ܒܗܘܢܐ ܕܒܢܝܐ: ܚܕ ܕܒܢܝܐ ܘܚܕ ܕܫܠܝܛܘܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܚܘܒܐ. See “on rebuke/instructions” (fols. 320a-329b) in *Homilies of Mar Narsai II*, (San Francisco: The Patriarchal Press, 1970), fol. 326b. Jacob of Sarug devoted a *memra* to the subject. See Khalil Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug: Quatre homélies métriques sur la création*, CSCO SS 214 (Louvain, Peeters, 1989), 18-30 (Syriac), 17-32 (trans.).

[493] As stated in the preface, this work was commissioned by Patriarch Yab’alaha III (1281-1317 A.D.), “The Book of the Jewel [lit. ‘the Pearl’]” in *The Nestorians and their Rituals II*, 381.

> they trampled upon and despised the Divine command, in order that they might become gods, and be released from submission to their Creator, after the advice of the devil who deceived them. Because of this, they became debtors to death, and fell under subjection to the devil, and were shorn of their glory, and put on shame, and were removed from the companionship of angels, and were cast into a land of curses. Their children also, because they walked in the selfsame way of transgression, bound more tightly to the yoke of the devil, and of death, on their necks and these forgot their Creator, and walked after their own hearts' lust, and the desires of their own minds, and nourished inquity, and strengthened rebellion,...

This passage clearly indicates, in agreement with John's own position, that individuals are punished because of their own free choice to sin, and not due to any inherited guilt (as reflected in the Augustinian notion of 'original sin').[494]

4.2.12 Resurrection

For John, the resurrection of the dead is a major doctrine in the Christian Church, its mystery being prefigured in the accounts of the Old Testament. Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of the fish (Jonah 1:17), and how the fish would spew him into the dry land (Jonah 2:10) prefigures Jesus' death and resurrection after three days (Mt 12:40; Jn 2:19). The belief in the resurrection of the dead was rejected by one Jewish sect, the Sadducees, at the time of Jesus minsitry (Mt 22:23-33), but many Jews believed in the resurrection such as Ezekiel's vision of the revived dry bones suggests (Eze 37:11-14), or as Martha replies to Jesus concerning her dead brother Lazarus, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (Jn 11:24).

John also uses the book of Maccabees, where he finds clear support for idea of resurrection and also the origin of 'prayers for the dead':

> At another time, when they were engaged in war, Judah and his men were victorious and uprooted a house of idols. But [certain men] among those who were with Judah stole some of the gold that was on the idols and became polluted by it. But they did not escape from judgement. For it happened that they fell in the fighting. Thus, when Judah arrived and saw the gold in their clothing, he knew that it was for this reason that God did not save them. They took [their bodies] and buried them. They sent [a message] to Jerusalem to the priests, so that, in the hope of resurrection, they might offer a sacrifice on their behalf so that they may be pardoned. From this derives the tradition of funeral vigils and the Eucharistic liturgy on behalf [of the dead] (fols. 31a-b).

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[494] An extensive discussion of the rejection of the concept of original sin in East Syrian theology may be found in Christoph Baumer, *The Church of the East*, 115-117.

Likewise, John sees a testimony to the resurrection of the dead in the story of the martyrdom of the widow Shmuni and her seven sons in the first book of Maccabees. Shmuni has been highly venerated throughout the centuries by the Church of the East. In John's account, the fourth son of the widow woman joyfully accepts his torture and suffering in anticipation of his resurrection and enjoyment of a blessed life with God by saying, "How sweet and pleasant is death [when] it is for the sake of God. It is good to bear hardship for the hope of the blessed life which is reserved by God for the resurrection from the place of the dead." After six of her sons had been killed, Shmuni gives a long speech to encourage her seventh son. Here as elsewhere John expands on the original account. Shumni says,

> Do not fear temporal death, because it is a path [travelled] by all. For blessed is the person who despises fear for the sake of the law of God, so that God might bring him into the blessed life by the resurrection from the place of dead. You should not be saddened by my departure from among you, since I only conceived and gave birth to you. I do not know, however, how you were formed and shaped, or [how] the soul was breathed into you and you gained life, and grew up, and reached maturity. This is a gift from God, and an action of the strength of his might and exalted wisdom. But with great trust, for the sake of God's law, [your brothers] delivered their souls to torture and death. Now be assured that just as you were formed by his will from the earth, so too is He prepared to resurrect you from the dust, and take you into the glory of his kingdom, and reward you with the recompense for your steadfastness (fol. 25b).

For John, one should not fear natural death, since it is merely temporal and a path upon which all humanity must walk (fol. 25b; see also fols. 49a, 103a). He also makes very clear that, for the Christian, the hope of resurrection (i.e. the defeat of death) is based on the union of divine and human natures in the person of Christ:

> Because of this [reason] was the taking of the flesh, as it is said: "Sin was strengthened through the law [see 1 Cor 15:56] because of the weakness of the flesh. On account of sin, "God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh for sin itself, so He may condemn sin through his flesh" [Rom 8:3]. Observe! It is not through His divinity but through His flesh. For this victory would not be great if sin was condemned by the divine nature. But this is an astonishing [thing] for angels and for humanity: that, in a spiritual struggle, suffering and mortal flesh would defeat the Law, sin, and death. If God the Word, whose strength has conquered all, was not in [Jesus], universal salvation would be very much weakened. However, the human [nature] of Our Lord surrendered himself completely to the dispensation of [God's] will. He endured the labours on behalf [of this dispensation] through the power of the Holy Spirit. He strongly and powerfully dedicated himself to the eradication of all natural motions, while being taught and guided by that One Who was in him and for Whom he was chosen. Thus, He fulfilled the Law and set us free from the Law, for it would be impossible for us to become free unless the Law was first condemned and abolished (fol. 96b).

4.3 Apocalypse

The term 'apocalyptic' is based on a Greek verb *apokalypten*, which means 'to uncover' or 'to reveal' something which is hidden. In the biblical sense, it refers to "the final revealing of divine mysteries."[495] The Syriac term for apocalyptic is *gelyana*. Thus the last book of the Syriac New Testament is entitled, "*gelyana* [Revelation] of Jesus Christ ..." [Rev. 1:1].[496] After all that has been said above about *Resh Melle*, it would be misleading to consider the work as wholly apocalyptic. On the other hand, John clearly expresses himself using apocalyptic imagery and themes when he interprets the events of his own day. In addition to a few passages in between, an apocalyptic tone can be detected both at the beginning of *Resh Melle* and, more extensively, at its end (at the end of book XV).

At the beginning of book I (fol. 4a), the author discusses how God's economy, grace, and marvellous deeds towards mankind were manifested during the various ages, yet humanity resisted Him, going astray, and this attitude foreshadows certain events at the end of time:

> As He has guided [the world], what marvellous deeds He has renewed for us through all generations in order that we may return to him. And yet how many evil inventions has our boldness designed, in order to hide far from him and not be persuaded. It is right [to say this], for now, as the blessed Paul says, "the ends of ages have come upon us" [1 Cor. 10:11], and "judgment stands at the door" [Mk 13:28; Jas 5:9].

But at the end of *Resh Melle,* John makes the point that the end has not yet arrived:

> These, then, are the causes of this chastisement that has come upon us, my beloved brother Sabrishoʿ. This 'is our evil that has turned bitter and reached right into our heart'. Truly I am aware that the end of the ages has arrived for us; I know this from the Holy Scriptures and in particular from our Lord's last words; for everything [that has been] written has been fulfilled. Men have become deceitful and 'self-loving, traitors, brutish, haters of all that is good, enslaved to lusts rather than to the love of God; they have the outward appearance of piety, but they are far removed from its true meaning'. The blessed Paul spoke about these things with reference to our time, and here they are. Likewise, as our Lord said: 'One people is against another, one kingdom against another.' Here are famines, earthquakes and plagues; only one thing is missing for us – the advent of the Deceiver. I imagine that these are his birth-pangs. ...What

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[495] McKim, 14.

[496] This only applies to modern translations. Thus, for John, the canonical books of the Syriac Peshiṭta (the Syriac version of the New Testament) consist of twenty-two books only, omitting 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

> other demonstration stronger than this do we need to indicate that the outcome of our Lord's words is at hand? [fols. 153a-b].[497]

Here John echoes Jesus' prediction concerning the end: "When you hear of wars and news of wars, do not fear; this must take place, yet it is not the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines and disturbances. These are the beginning of the birth pangs" (Mk 13:7-8).[498]

Following biblical precedent, heavenly and earthly signs are interpreted by all Church Fathers as indications of the eschaton. Here is what Aphrahaṭ has to say regarding the wars, famines, and persecution of the fourth century: "I have written these things to remind myself as well as you, my beloved. Therefore, love virginity, the heavenly portion, the fellowship of the watchers of heaven, since nothing exists that resembles it. Christ lives in these who live this way. The summer season has approached since the fig tree has blossomed and its leaves have come out. The signs that our Saviour gave have begun to be fulfilled. For He said, 'People will rise against people and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and plagues and terrors from heaven'. Behold, all these things are being fulfilled in our day."[499] And in a hymn of praise which is incorporated in the book of *Ḥudra*, a similar notion of the end is clearly expressed by Babai of Nisibin:[500] "With sorrow and tears of supplication we call upon you, O good Lord. There are no righteous among us to bring reconciliation with You; for our wickedness has grown strong, and our guilt multiplied. They caused the sea and the dry land and everything that is in them to be stirred up and disturbed against our evil [works]. In our time is fulfilled that which is written: 'The end of the ages has fallen upon us.'"[501] Likewise, in the last book of *Resh Melle* (XV, fols. 146b-149a), John describes the contemporary state of the Church, which in his view has become corrupted:

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[497] Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century", 72-3.

[498] See also Mk 13:28: "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near."

[499] See Aphrahaṭ at the end of his 6th demonstration (On the sons of Covenant), "De monachis" by Aphraatis Demonstrationes VI, in *Patrologia Syriaca, Pars prima*, ed. Accurante R. Graffin, (Paris: 1894; repr. Turnhout, Belgium: Editions Brepols, 1980), 239-312. Also, *the Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage*, trans. Adam Lehto, (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2010), 198.

[500] In the *Ḥudra*, the hymn which begins: "With sorrow and tears..." (see *Ḥudra*,vol. I, 308) is anonymous. However in the book of *daqdam wad-wathar* the same hymn is attributed to Babai of Nisibis (6th/7th century).

> It is right that, since we have narrated above the praise of our strength when we were worthy of [such praise], so too now we should make public our impudence without concealment. [For] the Scripture says, "Cursed is the one who calls good evil and evil good" (Is 5:20). For this time of peace which came upon us brought all of us to all of this impudence, as [it is written] concerning Israel: "But Israel became fat and kicked; he became fat and strong and acquired [many] possessions. He forsook God, who had made him, and cursed the Mighty One, who had saved him" (Deut 32:15). This same thing has happened to us! Those in the West unshakingly held on to their wickedness, but we who considered ourselves to be holding the true faith were distant from Christian deeds to the point that if someone from former times were to be revived and see us he would be seized with consternation, and would say, "This is not the Christianity from which I departed at a [former] time."
>
> Therefore, I am obliged to expose all these things, so that we might know that all that has happened to us has happened through a just judgement, since we have been rewarded according to what we deserve and what we have done (fol. 146b).

After John provides this short introduction, he documents the corruptions in the Christian Church which have resulted in this "just judgement." First, he addresses bishops, who have deviated from preaching the word and from comforting the faithful. Instead, they issue commands to those under their authority, treating them like non-rational [sheep]. They act like tyrants since they receive their command not from Christ but from secular rulers, becoming involved in court affairs and unlawful accusations (fols. 146b-147a). Likewise, priests and deacons are not serving Christ but their bellies and have become servants of Caesar (fol. 147a). The greatest wickedness is found among those whom John calls ܗܘܦܪ̈ܟܐ ('governors') and ܐܪ̈ܟܘܢܐ ('officials').[502] They have no mercy on the members of Christ's body, since they go beyond what is required of them[503] and live in luxury while the Christians under their jurisdiction live in poverty. In the same tone John criticizes members of the Christian community who are described as "the rich" and "judges."

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[501] The book of *Ḥudra*, vol. I, 308.

[502] John here (by 680s A.D.), is clearly referring to members of the Christian community who were appointed by the Arab administration. The Catholicos, Ishoʿyahb (649-659 A.D.) wrote *the Account of Ishoʿsabran* (d. 620/21 A.D.) when the former was a metropolitan of Arbela (that is, before 649 A.D.). In this account, the term *resah damhaymne* (ܪܫܐ ܕܡܗܝܡ̈ܢܐ ; "the chief/prince of belivers") is used twice while identifying two different persons by the same title. The context of the two attestations clearly reveal that each *resha damhaymne* was representing a Christian community such that when Ishoʿsawran was visited by "another man, son-of-free (ܒܪ ܚܐܪ̈ܐ), the chief/prince of belivers of the region land of Nuhadra. Ishoʿyahb is making use of the term in the historical context of 620s A.D. and before the Arab's conquest of Mesopotamia. See, "Histoire de Jésus-Sabran, écrite par Jésus-Yab d'Adiabène," ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, *SO*, 485-584.

John also speaks in very harsh terms about the laity (ܦܘܠܛܐ ܕܥܡܐ): "Who would dare to call these ones the people of God? For they yell at the poor who are knocking at [their] door, [treating] them like dogs... What then? What do you think? Are these [facts] or not? Yes they are..." He then describes a number of transgressions among the laity: "persecution of priests"; "mingling with pagans"; "dishonouring of the holy temples"; "disregard of the divine mysteries"; "contempt of the holy Sunday"; "negligence of the gatherings on the feasts of our salvation"; "abandonment of the canonical first-offerings and tithes"; "killing and adultery, plundering and looting." He ends his critique of the Christian community with the following words: "What then, O my companions? Are these things [happening] or not? I know that they are, for I have grown tired of recounting them! For this time of peace has brought all these evil things to us" (fols. 148a-b). He then turns his attention to the various disasters that have been sent by God to chastise his people. Many of these have come, he says, through the civil war among the Arabs:

> God revealed signs in heaven, which our wickedness saw but neglected... The kingdom [which ruled] over us was divided into two parts, and each one of them was looting the other, [yet] our hard hearts were not torn open. [God] brought plunderers and they destroyed towns; [He] made the paths into desert. But in our wickedness, we continued in all these [transgressions], like sheep in their pasture... Therefore, I say, with Isaiah the prophet, from the person of our Lord, 'Heaven and earth,[504] rational and non rational [beings]! Judge between Me any my people! What more should I have done for my people which I have not done? I expected them to do good things, but they did evil things.Wait a little and see what I will do to my people' (fol. 149a).[505]

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[503] In this context, John blames the Christian officials (whom were appointed by Arab administration) as they were requiring more taxes than what was demanded.

[504] Psalm 50:4

[505] John paraphrases Isaiah where the biblical text reads, "And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. (See Is 5:3-5).

In a passage quoted above, John states that only one thing is left to happen in the eschatological timeline: the coming of the Deceiver (i.e., the Antichrist). For John, the arrival of the Antichrist (ܐܢܛܝܟܪܝܣܛܘܣ) will confirm that the end is about to arrive (fols. 79b; 104b). As seen above, John did not think that the Deceiver had arrived in his own day. He reminds the reader, however, that the arrival of this figure can be considered a certainty, based as it is on the sure promises of God:

> Each one of the things that he foretold through the prophets was fulfilled in its time. At the end, He intends to teach us through action, that also these things which he has promised through the apostles will be fulfilled without alteration... For we ought to believe what He promises now concerning the the coming of the Son of Perdition [i.e. the Antichrist], and the end of the temporal world, and the resurrection, and the judgement, and the departure into immortal life. For just as He did not lie in His earlier [promises from the Old Testament], so too He has not spoken falsely in these later [promises from the New Testament] (fols. 27b-28a).

John sees a symbolic reference to the Antichrist in the account of the destruction of the golden calf by Moses:

> [T]he Holy Spirit indicates to us the coming of the Son of Perdition [i.e. the Antichrist] through the calf which the Jews made... For Moses was on the mountain with God while preparing the mysteries of the construction of the Tabernacle and of divine worship. But when he was delayed a little, the Jews forgot their Saviour... So they made for themselves a leader, the golden calf, to take them back to Egypt, which Moses discovered when he went down. He ground it into powder, and scattered it in every direction [Ex 32:20], and by this he chastized those who followed after [the calf]. Let us now understand the hidden mystery in this [account]. [For] Jesus our Lord came in the likeness of Moses. He saved mankind and delivered them from the subjugation of Satan, who is in the likeness of Pharaoh... After these things, He ascended into heaven to His father in order to prepare a kingdom for them... [Since] He has delayed a little, many are prepared to forget Him. And like the Jews, they will say, "This Jesus, whom we had thought was our Saviour, said to us, 'Abandon the world and its desires, which is in the likeness of Egypt, and I will bring you into the kingdom of heaven.' He has delayed! He lied! We do not know what became of Him!" Then the scribes and priests of the house of Aaron will make that cursed foreigner, [that is], the calf that will cause this perishable world to serve [his will]. He will be their ruler and will enter them into the darkness of wearisome Egypt. Then all the nations will beat drums and respond before him, "O Israel, this is your god who has delivered you and gathered you to your inheritance." Then our Saviour will be sent by the Father who is in heaven, just as Moses, [when he was] on the mountain, [was sent] by God. He will come and find the Son of Perdition [i.e. Antichrist], and destroy him and make him disappear, just as Moses [did] to that calf. He will cause him to suffer in the everlasting fire, along with all those who followed him (fols. 60a-b).

Likewise, the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal is given an eschatological reading:

> She [i.e. Israel] made for herself a second Baal, [who is] the cursed stranger, the deceiving Antichrist. And in a loud voice she began to have adultery with him without shame. And what must follow? It is necessary for Elijah to come again and rebuke the adulteress. But he will come and she will not be persuaded. For he will come according to the word of the prophet: "He will turn the hearts of parents

> toward [their] children" [Mal 4:6; Sir 48:10; Lk 1:17] But Baal will provoke him, and the prophets of Baal will plot against him. Jezebel will again threaten him, but he will not be afraid of her, for he will pierce her with the arrows of his words. It was for this that the Grace [of God] is keeping Elijah: so that he will come again and rebuke the adultress and destroy the Baal. In that day, the Church of the nations, like an oppressed widow, will receive Elijah and honour him. She will also be honoured by him through the hope and the endurance that are firmly established in her through his diligence. This is the mystery which Elijah delivered in the first Baal, which was made by the adulterous congregation. This [mystery] is [revealed in] the second Baal, which she, that murderer, is preparing to make. It is for this reason that Elijah is kept in Paradise. And because of this, Elijah will arrive first to rebuke the violence of the impetuous. He will also immediately prepare the way for the divine manifestation of our Saviour. At a given time, these things were delivered as mysteries, but in their [appointed] time they will be revealed in a clear enactment [of God's will] (fol. 79b).
>
> He also informed them concerning the end of the world and concerning the coming of Antichrist and how he will be received by the Jews. On one occasion, he said to the Jews, "If another comes in his own name, you will believe him" [Jn 5:43].[506] For he also warned them in [the parable of] the weeds, which, as he showed, would grow among the wheat (fol. 104b).

In his "*Memra* on New Sunday", John twice states (see fols. 203b and 208a) that Christ came during the "sixth millennium" (ܐܠܦܐ ܫܬܝܬܝܐ), and he uses the phrase "seventh millennium" six times (four times in fol. 208a and twice in fol. 208b) to refer to the end of the world:

> [...] The [Apostles] taught that this day is to be called "the New Sunday."[507] Let us examine what caused it to be called this. According to [our normal] discernment, the title 'New [Sunday]' fits [more] with resurrection [Sunday], on which our Saviour rose and life was manifested for mortals. Great mysteries are hidden in this eighth[508] day! The mouth is unable to speak the glories that are declared through it. There is no discourse that can reveal its mystery, nor is there an ear to hear its speech, since its investigation is hidden from discourse and its declaration from hearing. Resurrection came through the first [Sunday], and renewal through the eighth [day]. There is One alone who knows [both] the first and the eighth. For all who died through Christ were raised with Him through the first [Sunday]; and all who were saved by His cross were liberated through the eighth. By the first, He established the foundation, and by the eight the crowning; through the first he manifested his mercy and through the eighth His grace. For six thousand years, He established for us a boundary to do business and to gather food for ourselves in order that we

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[506] Most likely, John is here drawing on Theodore of Mopsuestia, since the same verse is interpreted by the latter as a reference to the Antichrist. For Theodore wrote: "... 'I have come in the name of my Father and you do not accept me, but if another comes in his own name, you will accept him!' [Jn 5:43] In this [saying], [Christ] indicated those things which would be performed by the Antichrist. At that time, your contentionusness will be reproved when you hasten to him and receive him..." (ܐܢܐ ܐܬܝܬ ܒܫܡܗ ܕܐܒܝ ܘܠܐ ܡܩܒܠܝܢ ܐܢܬܘܢ ܠܝ: ܐܚܪܝܢ ܢܐܬܐ ܒܫܡ ܢܦܫܗ ܠܗܘ ܬܩܒܠܘܢ. ܪܡܙ ܒܗܕܐ ܥܠ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܥܬܝܕܝܢ ܠܡܬܥܒܕܘ ܒܝܕ ܐܢܛܝܟܪܝܣܛܘܣ. ܗܝܕܝܢ ܠܗ ܥܬܝܕܐ ܕܬܬܟܣܐ ܚܪܝܢܘܬܟܘܢ: ܟܕ ܕܠܘܬܗ ܗܘ ܪܗܛܝܬܘܢ: ܘܠܐ ܬܩܒܠܘܢ...)
See *Theodori Mopsuesteni Commentarius In Evangelkum Iohannis Apostoli*, ed. J.-M. Vosté, (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1940), Syr. vol. 115, 128.

[507] In the Christian liturgical year, the Sunday that follows Easter Sunday (the Sunday of Resurrection) is called "New Synday."

[508] John argues here that the "New Sunday" represents the new creation though Christ. He sees a symbolic meaning in a reference to "eight days" which occurs in the Gospel of John: "And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, while the doors were shut, and stood in their midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (Jn 20:26). For John, the 'New Sunday' (i.e. the first Sunday after Easter) represents the new (eschatological) order established by Christ.

> may rest in the seventh millennium. Our race has neglected his commandments and disregarded His laws, and the seventh millennium has approached and few among us will have rest (fols. 207b-208a).
>
> In the Sabbath [legislation], He established a law that every person shall rest from his labour. The Creator, who never becomes tired, completed His work and rested on the Sabbath. Our wickedness has compelled our Creator not to rest on the seventh [day], and He will come to speak a judgement against [those] servants who did not obey His words. He completed his work by the Sabbath and it is stated that He rested from His work. But His love compelled Him to descend to Sheol, to speak a judgement, and to set us free. For our sake, He dissolved the Sabbath and spoke a judgement against the Evil One. He freed our race from the hands of [the Evil One], and rested on the eighth day. Behold the mystery concerning the future! Behold the declaration of hidden things! Behold the symbol of the judgement to come, that will occur at the end of the creation! [There is] a little [judgement] in the sixth millennium and a little in seventh millennium, and all the creation will collapse, and all the orders will be confused. And Christ our victorious king will be manifested during the seventh millennium; He will cause every person from earth to rise, and He will bring an end to creation (fol. 208a).

The belief that the end of the world is connected with the seventh millennium is also expressed by the 10th century author Eliyya, bishop of Anbar, in his metrical work entitled *The Book of Centuries*. After mentioning the continual circling of the seven planets and the perpetual repetition of the cycle of the week, Eliyya states that “there is neither stillness (ܫܠܝܐ) nor calm (ܢܘܚܐ) for those [seven planets] nor stopping for these [seven days], until the end and the conclusion of seven thousand years.”[509]

4.4 Exegesis

While most of John’s other works are on asceticism and theology, in *Resh Melle* John is often engaged in exegesis. This exegesis is usually employed to make a theological point (e.g. to discuss the Trinity or Christology). His exegesis can be divided into three categories. In the first, John discusses difficult or confusing Syriac terms in order to clarify their significance, sometimes comparing between them. In the second category, John offers typological interpretations of biblical figures and events (interpretations which reflect the influence of Antiochian theology). Thirdly, John presents a lengthy and systematic interpretation of certain Psalms which he regards as messianic. John’ purpose of interpretation is to present to his reader(s), when it is deemed necessary by him, pedagogic theology and Christology through the perspective of his own Church.

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[509] See MMC, Syr. 579, Eliyya of Anbar, *Book of Centuries*, Part II, 1.3.19.

4.4.1 The clarification of difficult terms

Countless are the nuances in technical terms in theology and exegesis, and John is at times concerned to explain them for his readers. For example, he distinguishes between *baroyutha* (ܒܪܘܝܘܬܐ; ‘creation’) and *tuqana* (ܬܘܩܢܐ; ‘formation’, ‘assembly’). For John, the term *baroyutha* denotes things which did not exist at one time and came afterwards into being, while *tuqana* relates to anything which was created but which requires further formation and development to reach its final form (fol. 5a). For instance, earth came into being through God’s act of *baroyutha* (creation), but it was further enhanced by separating dry land from the waters through God’s act of *tuqana* (formation). John praises God’s activity in creation which reveals His greatness as the Designer who knew in advance about the final stage of his work; His ideas about what to make were not random (fols. 3b-4a).

Likewise, the different meanings of the following closely related terms are also analyzed: *qudsha* (ܩܘܕܫܐ; the Holy), *qudasha* (ܩܘܕܫܐ; making holy), *m-qadshana* (ܡܩܕܫܢܐ; the Maker of holiness), and *qaddishutha* (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ; holiness) (fols. 70a-b). The Holy Spirit is called *ruḥa d-qudsha* and not *ruḥa m-qadshana*, although He indeed is holy in his essence (ܟܝܢܗ; *kyane*) and His hypostasis (ܩܢܘܡܗ; *qnome*) from eternity, since “[He is] the true and perfect Holy One, and the cause of all sanctifications” (fol. 70a). The term is also attested in the Liturgy of the Church of the East with the same connotation. For example, in one of the verses of an anthem of reconciliation, the deacons loudly recite, “Let us take (*nessaw* ܢܣܒ; i.e. ‘eat’) the *qudsha* (ܩܘܕܫܐ; the Holy thing) in order to become holy by the Holy Spirit.” The assembled congregation answers with the words, “O Lord, pardon the sins and foolishness (i.e. ‘guilt’) of your servants.”[510] Again, after the section of the liturgy known as the “Peace of the Lord”, the officiant of the liturgy (a bishop or a priest) proclaims, “*qudsha* (ܩܘܕܫܐ; the Holy thing) *l-qaddishe* (ܠܩܕܝ̈ܫܐ; to those whom made themselves holy, i.e. the cleansed ones) is entirely proper.”[511] However, the terms *qaddishutha* (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ; holiness) and *qudsha* (ܩܘܕܫܐ) are not the same, for it is *qudsha* (ܩܘܕܫܐ) that brings others to [the state] of *qaddishutha* (fol. 70b).

These brief explanations of terms suggests that John made use of certain reference works, like the later *Scholion* of Theodor bar Koni.[512] Among other earlier works which John may have consulted are the three-volume work entitled *Questions on the Bible* by the sixth/seventh century exegete Michael Baduqa*, The Interpretation of the Bible* by Babai the Great (d. 628 A.D.), or such earlier Antiochene and Cappadocian works as *The Questions on the Octateuch* by the fifth century Theodoret of Cyrus, or the *Commentary on the Nicene Creed* of Theodore of Mopsuestia who demonstrates that the term ‘holy’ was properly applied by the Nicene fathers to the Persons of the Trinity.[513]

4.4.2 Typological interpretation

The method of typological interpretation which belongs to the School of Antioch was acknowledged and implemented by the schools and monasteries of the Church of the East, particularly in the School of Nisibis. John opens his seventh book by quoting Paul: “The Law contained the shadow of what is to come, but not the substance of these matters” (Col 2:17; fol.

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[510] *The Liturgy of the Church of the East*, ed. Joseph Qalayta, (Mosul: The Assyrian Press, 1928), 46.

[511] Here, the congregation would humbly recite, “The One Father is Holy, the One Son is Holy, the One Holy Spirit is Holy, for ever and ever. Amen.” Thus they affirm that the perfect holiness of God is not shared by his worshippers. See *The Liturgy of Church of the East*, ed. Joseph Qalayta, (Mosul: The Assyrian Press, 1928), 48.

[512] Theodorus Bar Kōnī, *Liber scholiorum*, ed. Addai Scher, (Paris: CORPUS, vol. I/65, 1910; vol. II/66, 1912).

[513] Michael Baduqa and Babai the Great are named in a *memra* in which John bar Penkaye lists scholars that he considers to be authoritative in theology and exegesis. See *Resh Melle* in BL *OR* 9385. It is entitled, “On Faith and concerning all our Orthodox Fathers who worked and prospered through it” (*BL*, fols. 236-244b).

58b). Like all Christian authors, he reads the Old Testament through the perspective of the New Testament. He demonstrates that many mysteries and symbols within the Old Testament pointed to future events that were fulfilled during the era of the New Testament.

One example is the story of Jonah, which is seen as a prefiguration of the ministry and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach repentance to its inhabitants. As John explains, for Jonah, this was a dramatic change, for instead of being sent to correct his own people, the Israelites, he was sent "outside of the [normal] custom" (ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܥܝܕܐ; *l-bar men ʿyada*) to the Ninevites, who represented the Gentiles (fol. 80a). John quotes Psalm 139 to argue that Jonah was fully aware that he could not escape God simply by fleeing to Tarshish (Jnh 1:1-3): "Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" (v. 7). Thus, John believes that "Jonah was making an excuse for his delay by moving from place to place: perhaps [the Ninevites] would repent, or, another possibility, God would withhold His wrath from them" (fol. 80a). The typological mystery is then explained as follows:

> Thus, [God] stirred up the sea against the sailors, who thought in a Jewish way: 'It is better for us if [just] one person dies, lest we and our ship encounter misfortune, as we expect [to happen]" (see Jnh 1:1-15). So they picked him up and threw him into the sea, since they were desperate, and through divine might he was kept inside a fish for three days as if in a tomb. And what he lacked of the knowledge of the mystery while among the living, there among the dead he learned it perfectly. And through seeking mercy for himself, he became wise [and realized] that even sinners ought to live. And with his redemption and exodus from the tomb, what he vowed in the belly of the whale he fulfilled with great diligence, and hastened to Niniveh according to the divine command. Through a simple and brief saying, he lifted up the fortified place, sunken in its sins, and placed it in a high position of excellence. Behold the jealousy among the people [of Israel]! Behold the disgrace of the circumcised! Behold the humbling of the spirit of those who boast in the flesh! Behold the demonstration and mystery of that which is to come! This is [only] a brief outline of the mystery. Now, let us also declare [its meaning]. Christ came according to the will of his father. He engaged with the [Jewish] people. He preached and taught [repentance] as Jonah had before. He clearly refused to mingle with Gentiles, as is seen in the case of the Canaanite woman. This was not because he was afraid, but in order to shut the mouth of the accuser. What about the sailors, that is, the scribes and Pharisees? The sea of their hearts was stirred up with evil. The storms and waves of envy rose up and sprayed against Him. What then were they thinking? They were devising ways to accuse [him]. The spirit of prophecy had fled from their hearts; the storms of evil had driven it out. But [this spirit] acted through their mouths without [their] perception, like a melody through a flute or like a harp, and by force moved the high priest to prophesy [as follows]: "It is better for us that one man should die and not the whole people perish" (Jn 18:14). Come [Jonah], son of Mattai, and see the declaration of the

> mystery that you administered! You [were thrown] into the sea by the sailors, and our Lord into Sheol by the scribes. You were in the belly of the whale, and our Lord Christ [was] in the heart of the earth. You lent three days and three nights [to God], and behold, they were paid back to you! Through the promise and the covenant you were comforting yourself, and you were demonstrating the false beliefs of the nations. Our Lord was holding trial with death and the Accuser, and was bringing back [the nations through] liberation and [paying] the debt. The fish was commanded and disgorged you out on the dry land. Satan was condemned and death was destroyed and Christ our Saviour rose in victory. Your redemption became a cause of salvation for one city, as a first-fruit, or a mystery within the Gentiles. And behold, the truth was perfected in the resurrection of our Saviour, and, through the salvation which is in him, in the renewal of all nations. Behold, O [Jonah], son of Mattai, your mystery is completed! Have peace for a time and rest.

4.4.3 Systematic interpretation

Resh Melle is a work which mainly focuses on the theological interpretation of history, but its author is drawn into systematic interpretation of the Holy Scriptures at certain points, particularly in relation to the subjects of the Trinity and Christology. The verse by verse interpretation of psalms 45 and 110 is a good example of this type of exegesis. In what follows, substantial passages are presented to illustratre John's method of interpretation.

4.4.3.1 Psalm 45

In books VII and VIII, John explains how Psalm 45 predicts the advent of Christ and the establishment of the holy Church.[514] He begins his exegesis by quoting and then paraphrasing each of the three lines of the first verse:

> [W]hen the blessed David wants to demonstrate truthfully the mystery of Christ, and the reason for his manifestation, he says: "My heart overflows with good words" [Ps 45:1a], [that is], 'I wish to speak a new and excellent thing which is going to be revealed in its time with great amazement. (This is how we should understand the meaning of 'overflows', that is, in the likeness of a spring that overflows with water for the cooling of thirst). Behold! My heart is gushing good words of prophecy concerning a new and amazing thing that is going to be in the world.' And what else does he say? "I will speak of my deeds to the king" [45:1b], [that is,] 'I am going to illustrate in these words the dispensation of Christ the King.' And [you may ask:] 'Where do you [see] this?' He says, "My tongue is [like] the pen of a clever scribe" [45:1c], [that is,] 'It is not for me to understand this. Behold! I am like the pen in the hand of the writer, that is to say, a harp through which the Holy Spirit sings.'

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[514] John uses the Syriac Psalter of the Peshiṭta and its divisions according to the rites of the Church of the East, where each psalm has a 'cause' and a 'canon'. The cause which precedes the psalm's first verse is attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 328 A.D.). The canon however, is attributed to the Catholicos, Aba the Great (540-552 A.D.). Thus the 'cause' and the 'canon', guide John in his interpretation of the entire psalm since he sees both psalms 45 and 110 to be messianic.

John goes on in his ‘exegetical’ enterprise to conclude that the essence of the “dispensation” (*mdabranitha*) is mercy:

> [You may also ask:] ‘Who is to be shown to us by you?’ He adds: “His appearance is more handsome than [all] men” [Ps. 45:2], [that is], ‘that King whom my word concerns’. You should not consider Him like the rest of the kings of the earth. Behold! He is exalted over all of them. That He is ‘handsome’ is not spoken concerning the appearance of His physical body, but it is said regarding His beauty, glory and exaltation. For he calls His manifestation His ‘appearance’. Likewise the blessed John the evangelist says: “We have seen His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten who is from the Father, full of grace and truth” [Jn 1:14]. By ‘we have seen him’, [David means that] He was not considered like a man but as the only Son of the Father. Likewise, David says here, “He is more handsome in his appearance than all men”, because he wishes to say, ‘He was a man, but not like ordinary men’. The manner of His greatness he clearly demonstrates in the following [verse]: “Mercy is poured upon your lips” [Ps 45:2]. This is to say, ‘Your dispensation is full of mercy’, just as our Lord too once said: “For this reason, He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach forgiveness to sinners, [to restore] sight to the blind, to strengthen the lame with sound walking” [Lk 4:18-20]. And again [He said]: “For I have come to call not the righteous but the sinners,” [Mt 9:13; Mk 2:17], and [to the paralytic] “Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven” [Mt 9:2; Mk 2:5]. In short, the entire dispensation and Gospel of our Lord is full of mercy.

The ‘exegetical’ task becomes long and at one point John decides to put an end to it, but not before he explains certain Christological terms:

> [W]e shall not explain all the verses of this psalm, lest our *memra* be of great length. [Rather,] we will speak briefly [concerning] those [topics] that are suitable for our account, and will show how [the psalmist] speaks about the two natures, though his speech indicates [the] one person [of Christ]. For he says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Your royal sceptre is a simple scepter” [Ps 45:6]. [The psalmist] said these things concerning the Word God, for He naturally possesses a divine throne. And in order to demonstrate that He posseses an authority and substance like the Father, he adds: “Your royal sceptre is a simple scepter”, [that to say,] ‘In nature, You are simple, from the beginning and forever a king in the likeness of the Father’. For that which is simple is of necessity not compound. If He is truly simple, then He is neither made nor is He compound. And whatever is simple in its nature, neither compound nor made, is naturally called ‘God’ (fols. 65a-66b).

In book VIII, John continues the Christological reading of Psalm 45 which began in Book VII. The fact that his systematic exegesis of this psalm is extended over two books reflects its significance for John. First, he detects a reference to the humanity of Christ, and even to his distinct natures which are united “not by force but by will”:

> The blessed David first declared to us concerning God the Word, through the [verse], “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Your royal sceptre is a simple scepter” [Ps 45:6]. Then he turned his speech towards [His] humanity, and attributes a single person to Him and says: “You love righteousness and hate wickedness” (v. 7). For God the Word does not need to put the darkness to the test in order to love righteousness and hate wickedness. But this [verse] truely fits the humanity which was adopted [by the Word], that which was set apart particularly for this from its union [with the Word] and its formation in

> the womb. We should never say that [this] union was forced upon [Christ's] humanity, but rather [occurred] through an agreement of the will, through [his] teaching, and through the work of crucifixion. For "He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death" (Phil 2:8). And what [was] his reward for this? "God also greatly exalted him, since He gave him a name that is above every name" (v. 9). For He was not only flesh. For there can never be flesh without soul, that which loves this and hates that. It is not the same with the divine nature, since the love of what is good and hatred for what is evil belongs to the rational soul. In order that we may comprehend that [the humanity of the Word] was a body with a soul, that is, was a complete person, he adds, "For this reason, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions" (v. 7). [He says this] so that we might understand that [Christ] was not anointed [with] oil according to the law, but through the Holy Spirit: "This Jesus of Nazareth, God anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38).

Then John sees in Psalm 45 the message of Christ addressed not only to Jews but also and mainly to Gentiles:

> Now that it is known that these [words] were spoken concerning Christ and not with reference to another person, let us also briefly explain the rest of these [words], which were spoken concerning the Church of the Gentiles and not about the daughter of Pharoah. First it is necessary for us to understand that before the coming of our Lord, all the nations were living in error and shameful works. Various according to their languages, their lands, and their races, they were also distinguished by their thoughts and by the idols that they invented. But when the coming of our Lord reached them, one faithful church was assembled from all [the nations], and through baptism, we all became worthy of adoption through grace. Now, the blessed David, who was seeing these things in advance with a spiritual eye, prophesies concerning them and says: "The daughter of the king stood in glory, and the queen on your right hand in a garment made with the gold of Ophir" (Ps 45:9). What I wish to say is that the thing which God unexpectedly brought about through his grace for the church of the nations is worthy of great astonishment and amazement. For He gathered her [i.e the church] from the error [of idols] to one body of truth. And without envy, He granted [her] adoption, and like a queen and a king's bride he adorned and crowned her with great glory. But so as to remind her, firstly, concerning the grace that was manifested in [her], and [secondly], to instruct her also about what is appropriate, he says: "Hear, My daughter, consider and incline your ear" (Ps 45:10). [It is as if God is saying,] 'It is right for you, through great diligence, to listen to this [divine] call while understanding that grace was done in you.' Thus, [God is saying,] 'I advise you, as a beloved daughter, "Forget your people and your father's house, so that the king will desire your beauty" (Ps 45:10-11). Abandon all the pagan customs of your father's house in which you were raised.' In the words "Forget your people and your father's house" [He is saying] 'Leave all the earlier things in which you wickedly living. And today, pay careful attention to these things which have been entrusted to you, so that you might be seen as even more beloved and worthy of blessing in the eyes of the bridegroom to whom you were betrothed. For it is appropriate for you to know this too: He is not your equal, but rather your Lord. Through grace, He came down to you. Thus it is proper for you to worship and serve Him as Lord, God and Saviour. And this is not demanded by Him of you alone, but also of all. He [also] makes this known when he says, "The daughter of Tyre will worship him" (Ps 45:12). For the blessed David would not say to the daughter of Pharoah, "You will worship Solomon as your lord," since she was the daughter of a king, and he was the son of a king. On the contrary, [Solomon] was carried away by her madness into the worship of idols, but she did not [pursue] what was his.

The contrast between Jews and Gentiles is highlighted in the following passage, which like the previous one, states that the Christian message is universal, not limited to one people:

> Nor are the words "Forget your people and your father's house, in order that the kings will desire your beauty" (Ps 45:10-11) applicable to the daughter of Pharoah. Behold! It was not because of the greatness of her age that Solomon took her, nor because of her great beauty. It is clear that [if] he desired her

> because of her lineage, this would be contrary to what is written. For who is not convinced that these [verses] apply only to the Church of the Gentiles? Let us see what he says at the end of this psalm: "Instead of your ancestors, you [will have] children" (Ps 45:16). That is to say, 'Instead of the teaching of error which you received from your parents, teachers of truth will come forth from your children. He made them rulers throughout the whole earth. Where, O Jew, does scripture show that the daughter of Pharoah became a ruler or a leader? For no ruler over the whole people came forth from Solomon; [his son] Rehoboam ruled and had dominion over one tribe only. Behold! The children of the Church are rulers and leaders in the four quarters of the world.

4.4.3.2 Psalm: 110

In book X, John shows how Psalm 110 predicts the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, namely the two natures of the Person of Christ. According to John, Psalm 110 is messianic, and here the Messiah is not merely 'human,' being the son of David, but also 'divine,' being the Lord of David:

> [T]he Jews... considered Christ to be a mere man, and [thought] that He was called 'Son of God' and 'Messiah' in name only because of his excellence, just as other persons [had been honoured]. However, our Lord questions them from the prophecy of David: "What do you say concerning the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Mt 22:42). They answered him according to the assumption that they had [concerning the Messiah]: "[He] is the son of David" (Mt 22:42). For the Jews were limited in their reading of the Law and the Prophets, and while it is clear that they spoke the truth, they were unable to understand that other [meaning] since it was beyond human ability. Our Lord, wishing to correct their ignorance, brings a testimony from David himself concerning his greatness: "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand" (Mt 22:44 = Ps 110:1). He [then] explains: "If David calls him 'my Lord,' how can he be his son?" (Mt 22:45)... From this it is known that Christ is the son of David, and the Son of God. For He is the Son of God by nature, [and possesses the properties of that] nature, and He is the son of David by nature, and [possesses the properties of that] nature, except that He was born without conception and was found to be without sin (1 Pet 2:22; Heb 4:15). For He is [born] from the Father without a mother, and [born] from [his] mother without a [human] father. He is One: Son of God and Son of Man. He is One in *prosopon* but not in nature. For the divine and human natures became united in will from the beginning in the one *prosopon* of sonship, without destroying their [distinct] properties. It is this *prosopon* who was called, and [indeed] is, 'Lord Christ' by the holy angels. This is Jesus Christ (fols. 92b-93a).

John's Christological expression as said above is very identical to what was said earlier by Babai the Great in one of his hymns, known, "Blessed the Compassionate One" (ܒܪܝܟ ܚܢܢܐ).[515]

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[515] .... [O]n the day of His annunciation (or nativity) the watchful ones glorified Him, with their halleluyahs in the heights above. Likewise the earthly ones offered Him worship, with their offerings in one honour. One is Christ the Son of God, worshipped by all in two natures. In His Godhead begotten of the Father, without beginning before all time; in his humanity born of Mary, in the fullness of time, in a body united. Neither His Godhead was of the nature of mother, nor His humanity of the nature of the Father. The natures are retained in their *qnome*, in one person of One Sonship. And as the Godhead is: three *qnome* one essence, likwise the sonship of the Son, is in two natures one person. So the Holy Church has learnt to confess the Son who is the Messiah. We worship, O Lord, Your Godhead, and your humanity without division (*repeat three times*). One is the power, One the majesty. One the will, and one the Glory. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for ever and evern, Amen and Amen. Babai's hymn is compiled with other

As was the case with Psalm 45, for John, Psalm 110 contains images which clearly point to certain characteristics of the Messiah: sceptre; firstborn; priest; king.[516] He explains these images in a long discussion in Book VIII. Some of these and other characteristics are given in the following quotations:

4.4.3.2.1 Sceptre

> An example of a [clear] statement is when the blessed David said, "The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" (Ps 110:1). Thus it is necessary to consider whom David called 'My Lord', since it is clear that he is speaking concerning our Lord Christ, demonstrating that he is not merely human, but the Lord of all. And through this [statement] he also indicates the two natures, while speaking [of them] as one. [For he] called him 'Lord' to demonstrate that he was God, and he said 'Sit at my right hand' to show that he was also human, for to him it was given to sit at the right hand [of God]. For the one who by his nature possessed this [honour] eternally was in no need to be addressed [with the word] 'Take [this seat].' This, however, was in every way a necessity for that [human nature] which was assumed [by the Word], since [the psalmist] demonstrates that he has rule over all through the One who assumed him, and says, "The Lord will send a mighty sceptre out from Zion and will rule over [his] enemies (Ps. 110:2). He is calling Christ a mighty sceptre, making known that those who lean upon him in faith will never be shaken to the point of falling. For he is not a 'bruised reed'[517] but a 'mighty sceptre'. Likewise, Isaiah also says, "A sceptre shall come out from the stem of Jesse" (Isa 11:1). The blessed David again says, "And He will rule over [his] enemies" (Ps 110:2). It is clear that if [his] enemies will be subjugated to him, no friends will revolt against him either. For anyone who wishes to revolt is certainly an enemy and out of necessary must be subjugated. And explaining the way of union, he says, "Your glorious people in the day of [your] power, by holy splendours from the womb" (Ps 110:3). He calls the whole dispensation of Christ, whether of this world or of the one which is to come, 'the day of power', showing that he is performing this through the power of God the Word which is in him. I am speaking of resurrection and judgement and the gift of incorruptibility, along with the rest of what Christ achieved here [in this world]. Thus our Lord also said, "My Father who dwells in me does these works" (Jn 14:10), making known His true connection with God the Word. And concerning his union [with the Word] in the womb, [the psalmist] says, "By holy splendour from the womb, I have begotten you, a child, from ancient times" (Ps 110:4). This was prepared from the beginning, and today, through the one that was born, was fulfilled through the foreknowledge of God. For through God, he became the first to be born to the life which is without decay. And through him, [God] caused all nations to be born into the true adoption, which is through resurrection from the place of the dead, the pledge of which we receive in this life as a confirmation. Thus the blessed Paul also calls our saviour 'the firstborn': "He will be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29) (fols. 74b-75b).

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short hymns that belong to different authors at the end of one of the major works of ʿAbdishoʿ. See, "Blessed is the Compassionate One" compiled at the end of *The Book of Marganitha (the Pearl)*, trans. Eshai Shimun, (Kerala: Mar Themotheus Memorail Printing & Publishing, 1965), 92-3; the same hymn is translated by Percy George Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals II*, (London: Darf Publishers, 1852; repr. London: A. Wheaton, 1987), 33-4.

[516] For a discussion of these images as they occur in early Syriac sources, see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*.

[517] A reference to Matthew 12:20.

4.4.3.2.2 Firstborn

He calls him 'firstborn' since he was the first to be born by the Holy Spirit into the world which is without decay. Then, by means of Him, through grace, [the Holy Spirit] caused us also to be born into the same gift. For just as Adam became the leader and firstborn for our entry into this world, likewise our Saviour Christ became the firstborn, the leader, and the cause of our entry into the new world. Thus it is well said: "I have begotten you, a child, from ancient times." [That is to say], 'From the beginning I caused you to share in those excellent things, as a first fruit, and then also through you [I will cause] your brothers [to share in these same things].' Thus, on account of His union with God the Word, He will be the first in everything, according to saying of the blessed Paul (fol. 75b).

4.4.3.2.3 Priest as Melchizedek

And showing the manner in which humans are worthy through Him to share in those excellent things, he says, "You are a priest forever in the likeness of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4). For it is clear that a priest presents sacrifices on behalf of others, like Aaron and his descendants. The Lord said [to Moses], "Bring [the animals] to me to receive the sin of the Israelites." Through [these] animal sacrifices, [the priests] were effecting the reconciliation for one people only. Christ, however, was not cleansing sins through the blood of goats and calves, nor he was the head of the priests of just one people, nor did he receive his priesthood from any human, nor did anyone entrust it [to him], as in the succession according to the Law. Otherwise, [the psalmist] would have said, "in the likeness of Aaron." This would have been appropriate to say if Christ was going to perform the duties of the priesthood which is in the Law. What then? "You are a priest forever in the likeness of Melchizedek." For Melchizedek was a man from [among] the Gentiles, and was the priest of God Most High. He did not receive this from any person, nor did any person entrust it [to him]. Moreover, he did not fulfill his priesthood through animal sacrifices, but instead was presenting the pure offerings of the mind to God, while making use of bread and wine as an illustration [of these offerings]. [Melchizedek] was able, however, to make many among his people to participate with him in a kind of mystery, along with Abraham the companion of God. He also received from [Abraham] the tithes which the order of the high priest requires. For together with his [office] of high priest, he was also in possession of the [office] of kingship, which he did not receive through succession. In brief, he was fully depicting the mystery of Christ our Lord, not through deeds and overt speech, but through his person. If you are willing, let us compare [him with Christ] (fols. 75b-76a).

4.3.3.3.4 King

[Melchizedek] was a king of the earthly Jerusalem, while Christ is a king in the heavenly Jerusalem. He was fulfilling his mystery through bread and wine; Christ also commanded us to perform [the mystery], as he himself did. He was receiving tithes from the people [of Israel] and from the nations; worship is offered to Christ our Lord by all, forever. He did not receive his priesthood and kingship from any one, nor did he pass it on [to any one]. Likewise, our Lord Christ did not receive the priesthood and the office of high-priest from any one by means of succession, nor did he pass it on to any one. Rather, he remains the king and the head of priests forever and ever, according the saying of the blessed David. And in order to demonstrate that He remains unlike Melchizedek and unlike the rest of the other priests or the kings upon the earth, the [psalmist] said: "The Lord is at your right hand" (Ps. 110:5), that is to say, 'By comparing [Christ] to Melchizedek, by no means [am I saying that] He remains like Melchizedek upon the earth in the temporal high priesthood. But since humans remain forever, He was taken from them [for the purpose] of unity with God the Word, and became the guarantor of the complete salvation of rational beings, and the mediator of all good things. Thus, it right that His high priesthood remains forever, not upon the earth like the rest of the temporal high priests, but at the right hand of God on high. As the blessed Paul also said, "For Christ died and rose [again], and is at the right hand of God and intercedes on our behalf" (Rom 8:34). In the likeness of the high priests, and continually, He offers awesome sacrifices

> on our behalf in the presence of the Father, so that through his mediation, all of us will participate in the good things which are anticipated (see Hebrew 9:24-29) (fols. 76a-b).

4.3.3.3.5 Vengeance

> In the verses that follow, the blessed David hinted about the vengeance which, at the end, He will enact against all those who deny [him], and how He will reveal His authority over all. For he makes this known through [the verse] "He will shatter kings on the day of his wrath" (Ps 110:5), since the idea in these verses is identical to that of the others that we have interpreted from the second Psalm. For there is one meaning which is the completion of both [Psalms]. There is a slight difference [between them], however: at the beginning [of the second Psalm] he declared concerning His passion: "Why do the nations rage?" (Ps 2:1) and so on. But in the [other Psalm] it is [declared] at its end, "He will drink from the valley by the path; therefore he will lift up his head" (Ps 110:7). [David] calls the enactment of [Christ's] dispensation 'the path'. It is called 'the path' because [it requires] much labour. [And by] 'valley' [he means] death, [as in the verse,] "For the sake of your Name, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." (Ps 23:3-4). And with respect to the words 'he will drink', likewise our Saviour also said, "If it is not possible that this cup might pass [from me], but if I must drink from it ..." (Mt 26:39), and again, "You will drink my cup" (Mt 20:23). Thus, the blessed David said it well: "He will drink from the valley by the path" (Ps 110:7), that is to say, at the end of His dispensation, He will taste death. And in order to demonstrate that [Christ] is not like everyone else in having sins, and that he is not [speaking] on behalf of himself, [the psalmist] says, "Therefore, he will be lifted up in his leadership" (Ps 110:7). With this the blessed Paul is also in agreement: "He humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death ... Therefore God also highly exalted him" (Phil 2:8-9). Moreover, it can be seen that the blessed Isaiah speaks in the same way regarding this: "I will divide him among many, and he shall distribute the spoil to the peaceful ones; because he poured himself out to death, he was counted among the wicked" (Isa 53:12) (fols. 77a-b).

After discerning the Christological elements in Psalm 110, John concludes his exegesis as follows:

> Observe, my beloved, how the prophets and the apostles agree with one another in all things concerning Christ! And again, [see] how they guard the differentiation of the natures and the oneness of the person, and while speaking concerning one [person], they signify two [natures]. For it is clear that the He who "made the moon and the stars" (Ps 8:3) is not the same in nature as He who "was made a little lower than the angels" (Ps 8:5). And He to whom the divine throne naturally belongs (cf. Isa 66:1), and of whom it is said that He exists as a simple substance, is not the same in nature as He who "was anointed with the oil of gladness more than his companions" (Ps 45:7). And He whom the blessed David calls 'my Lord' (Ps 110:1) is clearly not his son by nature. For the son of David by nature is He of whom he said, "He will drink from the valley by the path; therefore he will lift up his head" (Ps 110:7)." For we never say regarding God the Word that [something] caused Him to be lifted up and exalted, but rather [that He possesses this] by nature (fol. 77b).

4.5 Pedagogy

Every work is in a way didactic since it is intended to convey knowledge to its readers or hearers. Nonetheless, there are reasons to believe that *Resh Melle* is more of a teaching tool than a deposit of information.

First, the work was commissioned by the Abbot Sabrishoʿ for the education of his monastic community, perhaps because the world order had dramatically changed – with the collapse of the Persian Empire, the weakening of the Byzantine Empire, and the advent of a new major power in the Arabs – and there was need to learn from these drastic events. Sabrishoʿ may have written a letter to request the composition of this work, but if this is so, it has not survived.[518] It is helpful to compare the relationship between John and his abbot to a similar situation a century earlier. Abbot Sergius of Edessa made a similar request in a letter addressed to a monk commonly named Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite. The latter quotes part of this request: "I have received the written messages of your God-loving reverence, O most virtuous of men, the priest and abbot Sergius, in which you ordered me to write for you as a record, when locusts came, when the sun was eclipsed, and when there was earthquake, famine, pestilence, and war between the Romans and the Persians."[519] The intent of Sergius is to keep a "record", but the didactic role of the "record" is highlighted by Pseudo-Joshua: "[T]he chastisements that came upon us are sufficient to admonish us and those who will come after us, and to teach us that through their record and reading of them they were sent upon us on account of our sins. If they did not teach us this, they would also be useless to us." Most probably this didactic intent was also shared by Sabrishoʿ, and thus by John as well.

The audience of John was none other than the monks of his own monastery. Since *Resh Melle* is a written document, its author obviously calls the readers *qaroya* "reader" (ܩܪܘܝܐ) at least three times. In one place he assures them that his work consists merely of brief accounts, i.e. light material, lest he burden the reader (fol. 27a). Another time he reminds them that his work is the outcome of assiduous research, having consulted various sources:

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[518] The four manuscripts of *Resh Melle* which were consulted for the study of my thesis begin, "In addition (ܬܘܒ), I am planning to write to you, O trustworthy companion, a valuable history of significant accounts. As God abundantly wills and gives strength to our words, corresponding to his glory and intention, we are able to demonstrate it." John's first word (ܬܘܒ; in addition or again) is very strange and it strongly suggest a continuation. Perhaps when John wrote *Resh Melle* to Sabrishoʿ it followed another work which contained a preface.

[519] See, Frank. R. Trombley and John. W. Watt, *The Chronicle of pseudo-Joshua the Stylite,* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 1; and, William Wright, *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite: Composed in Syriac A.D. 507*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882; repr. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

> Likewise, we desire that this account of ours would gain strength from [various] accounts that were compiled through hard labour from [various] books and from nature. As they are compiled and set before the reader, he will [gain] considerable assistance [from them] (fol. 23b).

Second, John insists that his work was made of bits of information, which is what the phrase *resh melle* actually means. He repeats more than thirty times the word *pasiqatha* "short/brief statements" (ܦܣܝܩܬܐ) to stress that his work contains basic information only. As discussed above (section 3.6), he uses the production of medicine as a metaphor for his own activity. Given his emphasis on the introductory nature of his discourses, he presumably expected that those who might be interested in deeper knowledge would seek out the sources that John himself had consulted in the composition of his work.

Third, the fifteen books of *Resh Mell*e were composed gradually and probably delivered as individual lectures. This is supported by the word, *ethmal* (ܐܬܡܠ*, yesterday*) expressed at the beginning of the eighth book in reference to what he wrote just the day before. It is possible that the books originally constituted a series of lectures which were read in different days. Thus, the expression 'yesterday' is not a conincedent, but may indicate that 'Book VIII' was delivered or composed exactly the next day, when Book VII was delivered or composed in the day before. This is of course one occurrence of the term, although an important one.

Fourth, at least in its present condition, lacks an introduction through which one would expect him to explain the scope of the literary project as a whole, and that his composition was a respond to the request of his superior Sabrisho'. Most manuscripts contain introductions and its absence in *Resh Melle* suggests that John never felt the need to add one to a series of individual

Books, even if they pertain to the same subject of 'history,' written and delivered one after another to a listening and or reading audiences.

Fifth, John often provides brief summaries of the previous Books at the beginning of each new Book, as evident in Books V, VI, VIII, IX, XI, XII, XIII, and XIV.[520] Through this practice, the author helps the minds of his readers and listeners to focus of the major subject.

John's literary output points to his didactic interests too. In Chapter II, his seven works are briefly discussed, all of which seem to fall within the didactic genre. This is clearly the case of his two works *Against Sects* and *On Catechism*, whose mere titles suggest that their primary purpose was to provide the necessary education reflecting the doctrine of the Church of the East; this education is defensive too in view of the inherent theological disputes. More significant is the fact that *Resh Melle* is classified immediately following John's other truly teaching work entitled *ʿal marduthа daṭlaye* "On the Education of the Young" (ܥܠ ܡܪܕܘܬܐ ܕܛܠܝ̈ܐ), in the *Catalogue of Authors* composed by ʿAbdisho' of Nisibis.

John may have acquired his teaching skills from flourishing schools during the seventh century and from methods found in early patristic works. By John's time, it was already an established norm that whenever the church administration was seeking to appoint an educated candidate for the office of the episcopate, the turn was directly to the monasteries, since certain monks were highly skilled in biblical and theological studies. Even though many monks would decline (not wanting to abandon their monastic life),[521] some surely accepted the call. Monks and ecclesiastics were also teachers in the academies of the Church of the East. We cannot rule out the possibility that John may have taught in one of these institutions.[522]

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[520] Even today, this method is used to refresh the minds of students with what was discussed earlier in class.

[521] During seventh century A.D., Isaac of Nineveh abandoned his office as a bishop after a short period. Likewise, according to John, Rabban 'Ukama of the Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol left his episcopal position and returned to his monastery. See John's *memra*, "On Rabbaan Sabrishoʿ, the founder of the holy convent of Kmol", *BL*, 190a-196b.

4.6 Homily

Although *Resh Melle* does not include any sermons in the ordinary sense of the term, certain literary aspects of this genre are evident. These include direct speeches, exhortations, addresses to historical figures in the second person, emotional statements, lamentation, and expressions of thanksgiving. Thus, at certain points in *Resh Melle*, we find John breaking the flow of his narration with material in a homiletic style, which we now examine in the sections below.

4.6.1 Direct speech

John makes use of direct speech either found in his sources or invented by himself. In Book III, he speaks with passion of the martyrdom of the Maccabean Jews, Shmoni and her seven children, moved by the courageous declarations of faith expressed by them during the sufferings that preceded their death (fols. 22a-26b). For John, there is no doubt that God was on their side, since they stood firm in their faith in His covenant. John creates an elaborate speech on the part of Shmoni, who encourages her children to stand firm in their faith:

> O my children, be alert, and do not be weakened. Remember Isaac, when his father Abraham bound him and placed him on the altar, an offering to God... Remember the company of Hananiah in Babylon... [L]ikewise, imitate the elder [and] virtuous Eleazar, who, though he was old and weak, strove valiantly, and through his firmness conquered the tortures and sufferings of dying for the sake of God's truth and justice... Do not fear temporal death, because it is a path [travelled] by all. For blessed is the person who despises fear for the sake of the law of God, so that God might bring him into the blessed life by the resurrection from the place of dead. You should not be saddened by my departure from among you, since I only conceived and gave birth to you. I do not know, however, how you were formed and shaped, or [how] the soul was breathed into you and you gained life, and grew up, and reached maturity. This is a gift from God, and an action of the strength of his might and exalted wisdom. But

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[522] For an earlier example of a monastic writer commenting on the theme of sharing expertise, see the opening lines of the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahaṭ: "For this request that you have made of me will be responded to freely, as it was freely received [see Mt 10:8]. Whoever has yet wishes to withhold from the one who seeks, that which he withholds will be taken from him. For whoever receives graciously should also give graciously" See *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage*, trans. Adam Lehto, 67-8.

> with great trust, for the sake of God's law, they delivered their souls to torture and death. Now be assured that just as you were formed by his will from the earth, so too is He prepared to resurrect you from the dust, and take you into the glory of his kingdom, and reward you with the wage for your steadfastness. Joyfully offer yourselves as sacrifices [in order] to appease him. For if He forgives and reconciles through the blood of young goats and calves, how much more through your blood, you who are in His image. You are wickedly being killed because of His people. [Therefore], let Him forgive the sin of our people and reconcile with us. Therefore, my children, you should not fear [any] earthly king, who exists today and tomorrow is gone. Rather, fear the King of kings, the Lord, the ruler of the world. He exists eternally and His authority stands forever (fols. 25a-26a).

Including direct speech adds to the emotional impact of a story, especially if it is being read out loud before an audience. John then shifts to rhetoric to further enhance the impact of the speech:

> How commendable is the virtue of [this] woman! By nature, women are weak, but her virtue and love towards God surpassed many. An old woman, a solitary widow, she was a daughter of Abraham, and was like he who prepared his only son as an offering, an acceptable sacrifice to be offered to please his Lord. The tyrant was amazed at her, but up to this point was silent because he was afraid that a woman might defeat him (fol. 26a).

4.6.2 Exhortations

Exhortation is an aspect of the homiletic genre which aims at strengthening the religious sentiments of hearers, encouraging them to practice virtues and to learn spiritual lessons. For John, a new era began with the annunciation given through the angel Gabriel rather than with prophets, visions, and revelations (fols. 94a-b), for with the coming of Christ, the prophecies were fulfilled through the manifestation of God's love and grace towards humanity. Here, the author talks to his audience directly about the meanings of the divine manifestation:

> Come and see how difficulties and lamentations and judicial decisions are dissolved one after another. Come and see reconciliation without requirements and forgiveness without conditions. Come and see how judgement is changed into mercy without any human advocacy (fol. 94b).

4.6.3 Addressing biblical figures

Addressing biblical figures in the first person is a literary feature which aims at instilling in the minds of the listeners religious lessons of prime importance, the Bible being a spiritual guide par excellence. In book I, John discusses the creation of the universe, the fashioning of Adam and Eve, and their fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. God is merciful and John emphasizes his grace and love towards his creation; his punishment on man is not severe but mingled with justice and love. John could have explained this in narrative form but he opted instead for a homiletic tone:

> O Adam, you are so honoured that height, depth, and all within are subjected to you! For even God who is your Creator has laboured six days for you and has assembled this expansive house filled with all good things. You did not obey his word even one day, however!

John then shifts to a 3rd-person description of Adam and Eve:

> O rebellious servants! They were not satisfied with that great honour that they had received from their Creator, which was great and surpassed their stature; rather, they were eager to seize His position (fols. 6b-7a).

4.6.4 Exclamations

Exclamations are to be expected in homilies delivered orally, but John does not hesitate to spell them out in writing as well. In book XI, he highlights Jesus' ministry and his message of peace, love, forgiveness and reconciliation, vertically between man and God, and horizontally between man and man. This ministry is a divine manifestation which began when the Saviour of all raised his voice to preach, a movement through which Grace began to chant beautiful melodies by the mouth of its harp (fol. 102a). John's meaning is clear: Jesus is the harp which 'proclaims' the wonderful melodies of the Word of God through his words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near (Mt 4:17). At this point John betrays his own deep involvement with the story:

> O the marvellous power of the new preaching! O the living tune which captured the world by infant words which were mixed with Grace! O the living light which shone the house of darkness, dissipating the sadness of the night!
> What else [was the response]? Come and see! The tax collectors and prostitutes, while renouncing [their] former [deeds], are inclined toward other [deeds] of great [virtues]! Come and see how the lame jumped like a deer. Come and see the tongs of the dumb set free. Come and see the eyes of the blind opened. Come and see the prisoners of the law set free. Come and see those seized under the curse are delivered. Come and see the legion of demons cast out. Come and see the natures being changed. Come and see the quarrelsome were complaining and trembling: *Have you come here to torment us before the time* [Mat 8:29].

4.6.5 Lamentation

Like exclamation, lamentation in homilies also expresses deep emotion, but usually follows the formal examples given in scripture, especially those found in the *Lamentations* of Jeremiah. Towards the end of book XV (fols. 150a-153b), John recalls Jeremiah's lamentation over the city of Jerusalem and the oppression of the people of Israel. But John himself is lamenting the outbreak of various catastrophic events that faced northern Mesopotamia during the 7th century. There was "deadly epidemic" (*mawtana*; ܡܘܬܢܐ), "famine" (*kapna*; ܟܦܢܐ), and "fear of plunderers" (*deḥeltha d-bazzoze*; ܕܚܠܬܐ ܕܒܙܘܙܐ). He says that "villages were burned" (*'iqed qoryas*; ܝܩܕܘ ܩܘܪ̈ܝܣ), "cities were destroyed" (*ḥraw mdinatha*; ܚܪܒ ܡܕܝܢ̈ܬܐ), and "fear ruled on every road" (*amlekh qenṭa b-khulhen 'urḥatha*; ܐܡܠܟ ܩܢܛܐ ܒܟܠܗܝܢ ܐܘܪ̈ܚܬܐ). He attributes these catastrophes to the sin of his people, which has made God silent and has turned his face away (fol. 153a). Although John's lamentation in *Resh Melle* is in prose, its theme is usually expressed in metrical poetry in many *madrashe memre* and hymns (ܡܕܖ̈ܫܐ) in Ephrem and Narsai, and which constitute a large portion in the liturgical book of *Ḥudra*.[523]

4.6.6 Thanksgiving

Expressing thanksgiving before an audience is yet another aspect of the homiletic genre. The Book of Psalms is a good source for relevant material and John exploits it well. In book X, John states, "Henceforth, let us come through our discourse towards the divine manifestation, in order to be enlightened by it and enlighten [others] through it, as help for our weakness is granted from above through mercy" (fol. 90a). This is a time of joy and celebration for John, which moves him to offer the following doxology: "Now it is time for me to declare: 'How abundant are you mercies, O God!' [Ps 36:7-8], and again, 'Who is like you, O Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome and glorious, doing wonders?'" [Ex 15:11; cf. Ps 35:10]. The same theme is expressed in the letters of Paul, whom John quotes extensively.

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[523] *Ḥudra*, vol. I, 260-461.

Likewise, as he reflects on the outcome of Jesus ministry as it is recorded in the Gospel, John emphasizes the magnitude of this divine manifestation. To him, this ministry brings hope, forgiveness, joy and thanksgiving to God. Thus, John is again moved to offer praise and thanksgiving to God who continues His good deeds towards mankind in His paternal love. Here John employs the Psalms and other scriptural books:

> It is now time for me also to say, together with the blessed David, "How abundant are you mercies, O God!" [Ps. 36:7]. Like a merciful father you have covered with the shadow of your wings people who are poor and sinners, "that they may drink from the abundance of your house" [Ps. 36:8], and "from the holiness of your temple", and "from your awesome righteousness" [Ps 65:4-5]. Truly, according to the word of the evangelist, "From the fullness (of the temple of God the Word) we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses, but truth and grace came through Jesus Christ" (Jn 1:16-18).

4.7 Philosophy

In general, early Syriac literature reflects a Semitic and biblical wisdom, rather than a philosophical way of thinking, but this does not mean that all Syrian authors were alien to Greek philosophy, especially in Edessa, which was halfway between the Semitic and Greek cultural worlds.[524] After the 5th century, the situation changed, and Syriac literature became replete with philosophical terms, idioms, and expressions used to express its Christological and Trinitarian theology, admittedly under the influence of such Greek authors as the Antiochene and Cappadocian fathers. Syrian authors favoured Aristotle over Plato, a fact which explains why Aristotle's works were translated into Syriac while "[n]o genuine works by Plato were ever translated into Syriac."[525] Although many Syriac versions of the works of Aristotle are lost, some have survived, including "Aristotle's *Organon*, that is, the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and the *Prior Analytics*, along with Porphyry's *Introduction."*[526] Such authors as Sergius of Resh-ʿayna (d. 536), Proba (6th century), and Paul the Persian (6th century) are among the earliest known Syrian authors who wrote philosophical commentaries based on the works of Aristotle.[527] In theology and biblical commentaries, the influence of Theodore of Mospuestia over East-Syrian authors was enormous, and thus his own philosophical and theological concepts passed onto Syriac literature since the time of Narsai.[528]

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[524] See Ute Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian*, CSCO 580 Subsidia 102 (Leuven: Peeters, 1999).

On two occasions in *Resh Melle*, John indicates to the recipient of his work that he wishes to 'make him a philosopher'. The context in each case connects 'philosophy' to a deeper understanding of scripture:

> There is no need to state whom these things were spoken about, since the course of events demonstrates their fulfilment. In order to make you a philosopher (ܦܝܠܣܘܦܐ ܢܥܒܕ), I will [now] introduce material concerning the manifestation of our Lord... (fol. 90b).

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[525] See Sebastian Brock, "Aristotle", *GEDSH*, 32.

[526] Ibid., 32.

[527] Ibid., 32.

[528] By the mid-fifth century A.D., the Christian Church (in Roman and Persian empires) had suffered major divisions due polemical Christological debates as they were more intensified after the Council of Ephesus (431) and the Council of Chalcedon (451). As a consequence of these two councils, Christians began to take side either pro or against. The Christians in Persian Mesopotamia (Church of the East) were politically been isolated as the only Christians who were living in mainly within Persia and outside the Christian Roman Empire. In their Christological doctrine they stood in supporting Nestorius and the position of the John of Antioch (whose position had changed at the Council of 433). Thus, in order to defend her position, the Church of the East never relied on Nestorius' works who was deposed at the Council of Ephesus, nor it relied on the works of John Chrysostom who was also deposed from his See at the Council of Oak in 403. Thus, the Church of East had relied heavily on the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia who is considered the father of systematic theology, and who was highly praised and honoured by the Christian Church until his death (d. 428 A.D.). In seeing that Theodore's works were of great support to Nestorius views in Christology, the former's works were condemned at the Council of Constantinople II (553 A.D.). After the the condemnation of Theodore's works in 553 A.D., (John Chrystostom and Nestorius had earlier been deposed from the See of Constantinople), it is no wonder that theologians of the Church of the East began to promote the use of the works of Chrysostom, as in the case of Ḥnana of Adiabene! ʿAbdishoʿ confirms that many works of Ḥnana were rejected by the Church of the East since they were not in agreement within the traditions of the Interpreter (i.e Theodore). However, ʿAbdishoʿprovides a list of Ḥnana's accepted works which consist of many scriptural interpretations and *memre*. On Ḥnana's works, see *Catalogue, BO,* III/1, 81-84.

> But in order that everything might be completed, and so that this book might not lack anything for the fulfillment of your desire, I will [now] introduce other material concerning the rest of these things, in order to make you a philosopher.(ܦܝܠܘܣܘܦܐ ܐܥܒܕ ܠܟ) (fol. 113a).

This raises the question: what concept of philosophy might be reflected in John's work, and is there any evidence that he used philosophical terms or philosophical concepts?

Resh Melle uses the following Greek terms or their derivatives:

Esṭukhse-ܐܣܛܘܟ̈ܣܐ, i.e. 'elements' is used 7 times. His ܕܐܪܒܥܐ ܐܣܛܘܟ̈ܣܐ ܐܒܗ̈ܝܐ 'the four principle elements' (fol. 132b), he refers to the four elements of the Greek philosophy (fire, water, air and earth) through which everything exists.

'Usia (ܐܘܣܝܐ; substance, nature) is used twice to distinguish it from *qnōma*: "The distinct characteristics of the persons of the glorious Trinity are not confused" (ܠܐ ܓܪ ܡܬܒܠܒܠܝܢ ܒܘܫܪ̈ܝܐ ܕܩܢܘܡ̈ܐ ܕܬܠܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܡܫܒܚܬܐ), for "it is one substance" (ܚܕܐ ܗ̣ܝ ܐܘܣܝܐ) (fol. 128b).

'Ithya (ܐܝܬܝܐ; Being) appears 11 times; in singular it refers to divine Being and in plural (ܐܝܬܝ̈ܐ) it refers to idols or pagan gods.

'Itutha (ܐܝܬܘܬܐ; essence, entity, existence) appears 16 times in reference to the Divine essence.

Ḥdayutha (ܚܕܝܘܬܐ; union, unity, oneness) which appears 6 times refers to Trinitarian or Christological union.

Kyana (ܟܝܢܐ; nature) appears 188 times with various meanings, but it is used strictly within the doctrine of the Trinity, it means God's nature, substance or essence.

Qnoma (ܩܢܘܡܐ; hypostasis, person, figure) appears 25 times, with different connotations. In the singular or plural form in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity it refers to the "person(s)" of the Trinity. In the Christological context it means hypostases.

Parṣopa (ܦܪܨܘܦܐ; person, *prosopon*, face) appears 21 times, but only some of these have a theological connotation. Among Syriac authors, the term is never used to refer to a person within the Trinity (here the term *qnoma* (ܩܢܘܡܐ) is employed), but to the person of Christ.

John also uses each of the terms “sophist” (*sewpasṭe*; ܣܘܦܣ̈ܛܐ) and “philosopher” (*pilasopa*;ܦܝܠܣܘܦܐ) twice.

These philosophical terms are used for the purpose of theological argument, but in a few cases John makes a specifically philosophical point. In the milieu of the seventh century it would be hard not to meet a Syriac author versed in biblical interpretation, theology, and mystical writings who had not learned such philosophical terms, and who had not been trained in philosophy, rhetoric, and Grammar.

Sometimes John uses the philosophical concept of causality. In *Resh Melle*, the term *ʿeltha* (ܥܠܬܐ) which generally means “cause, reason,” occurs 97 times. In many of these occurrences the the term does not have a philosophical connotation:

> (fol. 7b): Adam realized that his first *reason* was rejected,
> (fol. 20a): When he made known his intention and the *reason* for his visit,
> (fol. 48a): [He knew] what would *cause* them to wander,
> (fol. 62a): The One who became for you the *cause* of all these good things,
> (fol. 114a): This is the *reason* on why our Lord was seen first to the women after his resurrection,
> (fol. 149b): And by this *reason* there was a great disturbance in Mesopotamia,

The term ‘*eltha*, however, is also attested in a philosophical sense, as in Book X, where the notion behind ‘*eltha* is clearly *first cause*:

> Now, [God] is confessed by triune: ‘the Cause’ (ܥܠܬܐ) and ‘the Causalities’ (ܥܠ̈ܬܐ). [God is] a Cause without a cause; and the causalities, [the Son and the Holy Spirit], are from the Cause. He is the cause of the causalities, and the causalities [being the cause] to all that came into existence. There is no cause however for the cause of all, such as neither there is another creator to [God] who created all. And as much as you go up [the chain of causes] you will [arrive] in finding ‘One’, *the Cause of all causes*, [that is] God the creator of all that came into being (fol. 92b).

Another of the works attributed to John shows that he was familiar with philosophy. In his *Taggara* (“The Merchant”), he provides the reader with wisdom sayings relevant to the ascetic life. The work is incomplete; Mingana manuscript (Syr. 47)[529] contains only two incomplete *memre*. By consulting these two *memre*, one can say something regarding the genre of *Taggara*. It would seem that each of its *memre* originally contained a hundred wisdom sayings of various length. They were numbered from (ܐ = 1) to (ܩ = 100), and were composed for the benefit of the monks and readers at large. The following sayings reflect a knowledge of philosophy:

> [I:14] If every thing [exists] in time according to the word of the wise, time is found prior to every created thing; but do not expect specific time for the One [Creator] who created time too (*Memra* I:14, fol. 253a).
> [I:24] We ought to inquire: Who is causing the motion? Who is being moved? What is the motion? What is the movement? What is the [underlying] power of thought? What is the justification of action? From here, we are able to do philosophy (*Memra* I:14, fol. 253a).
> [I:25] The theory of these things that came into existence is one in likeness, as are the motions of the mind. Thus the continuation of a being is the life of the mind (*Memra* I, 25, fol. 253a reads).

Traces of philosophical reasoning may be detected in Book VI where John uses the metaphor of ‘the designer’ (ܐܘܡܢܐ; ‘*ummana*) to argue about God’s foreknowledge. Thus John uses the image of a ship’s structure existing in the mind of a craftsman. The skilful craftsman, before making a ship, is fully aware and understands which wooden board is to be placed first, which one to be at the centre, and which should be installed at the end. For John, the same is true of God: He had a perfect knowledge during his activity in the creation (fols. 47b-48a). Through this argument John makes use of philosophy with regard to ‘theory and practice’. Just as a ship is perfectly conceived in the mind of the craftsman and is then executed in the actual making of the ship, so too God, in creating the world, knew in advance just what He wanted to do and how He would do it.

Finally, one can catch a glimpse of philosophical reasoning in John’s in book VII. Here John argues that it is impossible to contain God in the human mind, for it is not possible for a creature to contain his Creator (fol. 67b). He argues that it is possible to contain idols in the human mind since they are man-made objects. The case with God, however, is different: "For it is not possible for a creature to contain his Creator, since that which a mind can contain is not a Creator. [Likewise,] it is impossible to determine the [identity of] the artist from his work. He can be known from his work in this way: [that he is] wise, powerful, and just. But neither his status nor his nature can ever [be known from his work]" (fol. 67b).[530] John goes on to argue that if it is possible for God to be contained by thought, then thought becomes greater than God. On the contrary, "just as the physical eye is unable to capture the extent of the earth or the sea, so too the intellectual eye is unable to capture the divine vision under its gaze." For John, all created natures have a boundary and their gaze is limited, but "God exists in all things through his wisdom and outside of all [things] in His substance. For He exists in all things and beyond all things, yet it cannot be said how He exists. And He who exists in every place but is not at any [particular] place, how can he be comprehended? If God exists in all things, how is it possible that He could be known?" (fol. 68a). Hence, for John, through human reason and logic, one can understand the characteristics of God but not His essence.

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[529] MMC, Syr. 47, *The Book of Taggara, Memra* I:14, fol. 253a.

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[530] These words echoe what later ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis had written, "Now, when we say [of God] that he is invisible, uncompounded, impassible, and immutable, we do not describe what He is, but what He is not." See ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, *The Book of Marganitha (the Pearl)*, trans. Eshai Shimun, (Kerala: Mar Themotheus Memorail Printing & Publishing, 1965), 8. Also see, "The Jewel [*the book of marganitha*]" by ʿAbdishoʿ in *The Nestorians and their Rituals II*, trans. Percy George Badger, (London: Darf Publishers Limited, 1852; repr. London: A. Wheaton, 1987), 380-422.

Conclusion

Both the traditions of the Church of the East and modern scholars confirm that Yoḥannan (John) bar Penkaye flourished during the seventh century A.D. He was a monk of the Monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol, and later in his life, became a solitary attached to the Monastery of Mar Bassima. Syriac tradition attributes many literary works to John, but his *Resh Melle*, studied here, is the only complete work to survive. Although *Resh Melle* lacks a preface, within the work John himself states that it was written in response to a request by Sabrishoʿ. There is a distinct possibility that the said Sabrishoʿ is not that of ʻOshakh who was appointed by Rabban ʻUkama to succeed him as the superior of the monastery of Mar Yoḥannan of Kmol. Rather, *Resh Melle* may have been composed for the second Sabrishoʿ, who was appointed by Sabrishoʿ of ʻOshakh at the latter's farewell speech.

John makes his purpose of writing very clear: *Resh Melle* is intended to explain to his readers the history of divine dispensation, i.e. God's grace and love towards mankind throughout all ages, in spite of human sin. To fulfil this purpose, *Resh Melle* includes brief biblical interpretations and exegesis, systematic interpretation of certain psalms, theological discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology, and many brief historical accounts. *Resh Melle* also includes apocalyptic themes, particularly at its end, since John is interpreting catastrophic events in the 680s (wars, natural disasters, an eclipse, famine, and plague) in the light of the Bible. John's *Resh Melle* is a universal history compiled from biblical and ecclesiastical accounts, but it also contains a lengthy account, in Book IX, of the varieties of ancient religious beliefs and practices. The persecution of Christians in Persia and in the Byzantine Empire is discussed briefly in Book XIV.

Early studies of *Resh Melle* generally saw *Resh Melle* as an apocalyptic work, which tended to minimize the number of historians interested in the work. Beginning in the 1960s, however, an appreciation of the work as a source for North Mesopotamian history during the Muslim rule in the mid-seventh century A.D. began to increase. Certainly, the work would have been appreciated even earlier if it contained substantial information about the early historical development of the Church of the East and its early synods, the persecution of Christians in Mesopotamia, the history of monasticism in Mesopotamia, and the Church's doctorine and teaching following the Council of Nicea (325), the Council of Constantinople (381), the Council of Ephesus (431), and the Council of Chalcedon (451). Writing at the end of seventh- century A.D., John would have had access to a number of sources which are no longer extant, but since his approach was only to give brief summaries, we should not be surprised to find that many details that the historian would like to see are lacking. John defends his approach as being the only practical way of achieving his goal of explaining, in brief (i.e., through '*resh melle*', 'main points'), the whole of God's dispensation throughout history. Thus John purposely avoids lengthy historical accounts, except in one place (the account of Shmoni, in the Macabbean era), where he asks his readers to pardon him for departing from his usual procedure. We agree with Baumstark's claim that *Resh Melle* is the oldest extant and complete Syriac effort at what we would call 'world history'.

The current study, however, has expanded our knowledge of *Resh Melle* by exploring the genres which it employs *within* the framework of a universal history. John himself tells his readers that he has composed *Resh Melle* by consulting a number of sources: he says that he has searched for various accounts and sources in order to strengthen his work, just as a medicine receives its power through its ingredients. These sources almost certainly represented a variety of genres. Although he would have had access to chronicles, *Resh Melle* is not itself in that genre – a fact that the author clearly expresses when he says that he is not interested in simply listing what has happened at certain times in the past. In this he is typical in the Church of the East. The *Chronicle* of Eliyya of Nisibis (d. 1046 A.D.) is the only work by an author in the Church of the East which follows the pattern of Eusebius of Caesarea.

When a critical edition and translations of John's works become available, they will encourage the further study of this important author. For example, there is large body of exegesis in *Resh Melle* that awaits further study. There is also much more to be said about John's theology, exegesis, Christology, liturgy, and his place in the history of the Church of the East. By John's time, all of the distinct characteristics of the Church of the East had already been standardized. The School of Nisibis played the major role in this process of standardization, and its influence extended to all the major areas of Church life. From its inception in the 5th century until the conquest of Nisibis by the Arabs in 640 A.D., it served as the major intellectual centre of the Church of the East. Many of its former students became bishops, theologians and biblical scholars, teachers and/or founders of new schools or monasteries. The most famous example of the latter is Mar Abraham of Kashkar, who, from 571 to 588 A.D., functioned as the superior of his newly-established monastery on Mt. Izla, which then became a model for the reform of all Church of the East monastic institutions. A standard set of liturgical prayers (*Ḥudra*) had been introduced by Ishoʿyahb III (649-659 A.D.). Likewise, the process of theological clarification that unfolded in the aftermath of the Council of Ephesus (431) and the Council of Chalcedon (451) had certainly reached its conclusion by the early 7th century in the writings of Babai (d. 628). Thus it can be seen that John is an important witness to the state of the Church of the East in the period soon after these formative developments had taken place. It is hoped that the present thesis will provide a foundation for further work on this significant figure.

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APPENDIX A:

The following is a list of the known manuscripts of *Resh Melle* as given by T. Jansma in his article entitled: “Project d’edition du *K^{e}tâbâ d’ Rêš Mellĕ* de Jean bar Penkaye.” L’Orient Syrien. *Revue d’Etudes et de Recherches sur les Eglises de langue syiraque. Vol. VIII, FASC. 1, 1 ^{ER} TRIM. Paris: 1963, 96-100.*

1. La copie la plus ancienne, terminée le 12 Tešrin I de 2186 A.G. (A.D. 12 octobre 1874) par un certain Daniel, au monastère de Mâr Petyon, est à présent au Musée asiatique de Léningrad. C’est ce même manuscrit qui fut décrit très succinctement par G. DIETTRICH en 1909.
2. La copie suivante, qui fut realise par le diacre Yawnan en 2186 A.G. (A.D. 1874/5), fait partie de la collection du patriareat chaldéen de Mossoul (N° 26), maintenant à Bagdad.
3. La troisième copie fut ècrite A.D. 1889 par le diacre Jacob et son frère, le prêtre Oša´na, de la famille de Bêth Sahraw. Il appartint à Oroomiah College, à Urmiah N° 218. Le sort actuel de ce codex n’est pas connu.
4. La dernière copie dont nous ayons connaissance fut achevèe le troisième jour de Šebaṭ de l’annèe 1901 par Išô´ bar La´azar à Qodšanes. Elle est maintenant au *British Museum* (Or. 9385, I°).

   Du manuscript Mossoul N° 26, une copie a ètè prise. Il est meme possible que ce codex ait ètè copiè deux fois.
5. La première copie a ètè terminèe le 28 mars 1882 par le moine Giwargis au monastère de Rabban Hormizd. Ce manuscrit est maintenant au couvent de Notre-Dame des Semences, près d’Alqoš, (N° 180).
6. Il est possible qu’un manuscript de la Bibliothèque Vaticane (le Vat. Syr. 529), ècrit en l’annèe 1918, ait ètè copiè lui aussi sur le codex Mossoul N° 26.
7. De la description du catalogue, on est autorisè à dèduire qu’une copie du manuscript Urmiah N° 218 (A.D. 1889) fut faite en 1890 (ce manuscript fut, comme son prototype, acquis par l’*Oroomiah College).* Nous sommes en effet informè que le manuscript en question (Urmiah N° 140) fut copiè par Išay bar Malek Yawnan sur un codex appurtenant au prêtre Oša’na Sahraw. Or, c’ètait ce prêtre qui, l’annèe prècèdente, et assistè de son frère, avait transcrit le k^{e}tâbâ d^{e}rêš mellê (cf. *Supra* au 3). Il est done très probable que le manuscrit Urmiah N° 140 ait ètè copiè sur le codex Urmiah N° 218 (on peut remarquer, en passant, que c’ètait ce prêtre qui avait dressè le catalogue d’Urmiah, dans la preface anglaise duquel la forme Oshana Sarau est donnèe à son nom).

   Nous avons connaissance d’au moins deux copies qui ont ètè prises du manuscrit Alqoš N° 180.
8. L’une fut ècrite à Alqoš meme en 1900 pour H. Pognon. Cette copie fut acquise plus tard par M. Brière.
9. L’autre copie fut effectuèe à Alqoš, la meme annèe, par Stephan Raës. Elle est maintenant à la Bibliothèque Vaticane (Vat. Syr. 497).
   Il est très probable que les trois copies suivantes ont ètè prises de meme du manuscrit Alqoš N° 180.

10. Manuscrit du *British Museum* or. 9384, I°, copiè pour E. A. Wallis Budge à Alqoš, par le diacre Iša bar Eša'ya, et achevè le 25 de Kanûn II de l'annèe 1893.
11. Manuscrit Strasbourg N° 4133, ècrit pour A. Baumstark, par le meme copiste que le prècèdent manuscrit, et achevè le 18 Dècembre 1897. En 1917, ce manuscrit fut acquis par la Bibliothèque de l'Universitè de Strasbourg.
12. Manuscrit Mingana N° 179, copiè à Alqoš par le diacre Joseph et datè du 22 Septemmbe 1928.

Outre les douze manuscrits que nous venons d'ènumèrer et qu'on peut tous, avec des degrès variables de certitude ou de probabilitè faire remonter, directement ou indirectement, à la copie qui fut ècrite à Tabriz en l'an 1262, nous avons connaissance de deux autres codices contenant le k^etâbâ d^erêš mellê, lesquels toutefois semblent dèfectueux, l'un et l'autre.

13. L'un, qui est incomplete au commencement et se termine au neuvième *mêmrâ,* et qui fut ècrit au XIXe siècle, se trouve à la *John Rylands Library* (Ryl. Syr. 43) (autrefois, Harris 18) à Manchester.
14. L'autre copie du livre de Jean bar Penkayé se trouve dans un manuscript de la Bibliothèque de l'Université de Cambridge (Or. 1318, fol. 161a - 176b). A en juger d'après le nombre des feuillets nous pouvons conclure avec certitude que cette copie, elle aussi, est incomplete.

En l'état actuel de notre information, nous ne sommes pas en mesure d'affirmer quoi que ce soit sur la date et la provenance des codices sur lesquels les deux derniers manuscrits ont été copies.

Conclusions: en laissant de côté les deux copies de la collection d'Urmiah, nous disposons de six manuscrits complets et de deux fragmentaires, sur lesquels on peut baser une édition. Bien que tous les témoignages existants datent de la fin du siècle dernier, ou soient meme plus récents, on peut dire de cette édition qu'elle représente essentiellement la forme du texte du *k^etâbâ d^erêš mellê* au milieu du XIIIe siècle.

APPENDIX B:

The following table shows the reading variations as attested in four manuscripts of *Resh Melle,* and it is limited only to the beginning of each book and the end of its first division with book nine.

Resh Mell	MS: BL (British Library OR 9385)	MS: BS (Strasbourg Ms. 4133)	MS: BP (Paris, R 90793, Syr. 405, and R 90794, Syr. 406)	MS: MM (Mingana Syr. 179)
Book: I	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ Fol. 3b	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ (ܕܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ) Fol. 1a	(Paris, R 90793, Syr. 405) ܡܐܡܪܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ (ܕܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ) Fol. 3a	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ (ܕܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ) Fol. 2a
Book: II	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܪܝܢ Fol. 10b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܪܝܢ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 10a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܪܝܢ Fol. 20a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܪܝܢ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 8b
Book: III	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܠܬܐ Fol. 18b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܠܬܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 20b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܠܬܐ Fol. 40b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܠܬܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 16b
Book: IV	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܐܪܒܥܐ Fol. 27b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܐܪܒܥܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 31b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܐܪܒܥܐ Fol. 62b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܐܪܒܥܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 25a
Book: V	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܡܫܐ Fol. 38b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܡܫܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 44b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܡܫܐ Fol. 89a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܡܫܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 35b
Book: VI	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܝܢ: ܕܫܬܐ܀ ܕܒܟܬܒܐ: ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ܀ Fol. 46b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܫܬܐ ܕܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 54b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܫܬܐ ܕܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 108b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܫܬܐ ܕܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 43b

Book: VII	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܫܒܥܐ܀ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ܀ Fol. 58b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܫܒܥܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܗ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 68b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܫܒܥܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 136a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܫܒܥܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 55a
Book: VIII	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܡܢܝܐ܀ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ܀ Fol. 71b	ܬܘܒ: ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܡܢܝܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 85b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܡܢܝܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 168a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܡܢܝܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fols. 68a-b
Book: IX	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܫܥܐ܀ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ܀ Fol. 81b ܫܠܡ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܫܥܐ܀ ܫܠܡܬ ܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ܀ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ܀ ܕܡܪܝ ܝܘܚܢܢ ܒܪ ܦܢ̈ܟܝܐ܀ Fol. 89b	ܬܘܒ: ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܫܥܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 98a ܀ ܫܠܡܬ ܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ .. Fol. 109a	(Paris, R 90794, Syr. 406) ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܫܥܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 180b ܫܠܡ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܫܥܐ. ܫܠܡܬ ܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ. Fol. 210a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܫܥܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 77b ܫܠܡ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܫܥܐ ܫܠܡܬ ܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܩܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ Fol. 85b
Book: X	ܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܕܬܪܬܝܢ ܕܝܠܗ ܒܕ ܕܝܠܗ܀ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܥܣܪܐ. Fol. 89b ܬܘܒ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ܀ Fol. 90a	.. ܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܕܬܪܬܝܢ. .. ܡܢܬܐ ܬܪܝܢܝܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ Fol. 109a ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܥܣܪܐ ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 109a	. . ܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܕܬܪܬܝܢ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ̇ ܡܢܬܐ ܬܪܝܢܝܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ. ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܥܣܪܐ Fol. 210b	ܬܘܒ .. ܦܠܓܘܬܐ ܕܬܪܬܝܢ ܕܐܝܬܝܗ̇ ܡܢܬܐ ܬܪܝܢܝܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ. Fol. 86a ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܥܣܪܐ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 86a
Book: XI	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܕܥܣܪ܀ ܕܗܦܘܟ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ܀ Fol. 100b	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܕܥܣܪ ܕܗܦܘܟ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ Fol. 122b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܕܥܣܪ ܕܗܦܘܟ ܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fols. 235b-236a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܕܥܣܪ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 96b
Book: XII	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܪܥܣܪ:	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܪܥܣܪ	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ

	ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ❖ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ❖ Fol. 113a	ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 139a	ܕܬܪܥܣܪ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 265b	ܕܬܪܥܣܪ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 108b
Book: XIII	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܠܬܥܣܪ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ❖ ܕܥܠ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ❖ Fol. 123b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܠܬܥܣܪ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 153a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܠܬܥܣܪ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܠܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 290b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܬܠܬܥܣܪ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܥܠ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 119b
Book: XIV	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܐܪܒܥܣܪ Fol. 133b ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ [❖] Fol. 134a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܐܪܒܬܥܣܪ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 167a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܐܪܒܬܥܣܪ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܥܠ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 315a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܐܪܒܬܥܣܪ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܥܠ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 129b
Book: XV	ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܡܫܬܥܣܪ❖ ܕܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ. Fols. 144b-145a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܡܫܬܥܣܪ ܕܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 182a	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܡܫܬܥܣܪ Fol. 340b	ܬܘܒ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܕܚܡܫܬܥܣܪ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܕܪܫ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܬܫܥܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ Fol. 140b